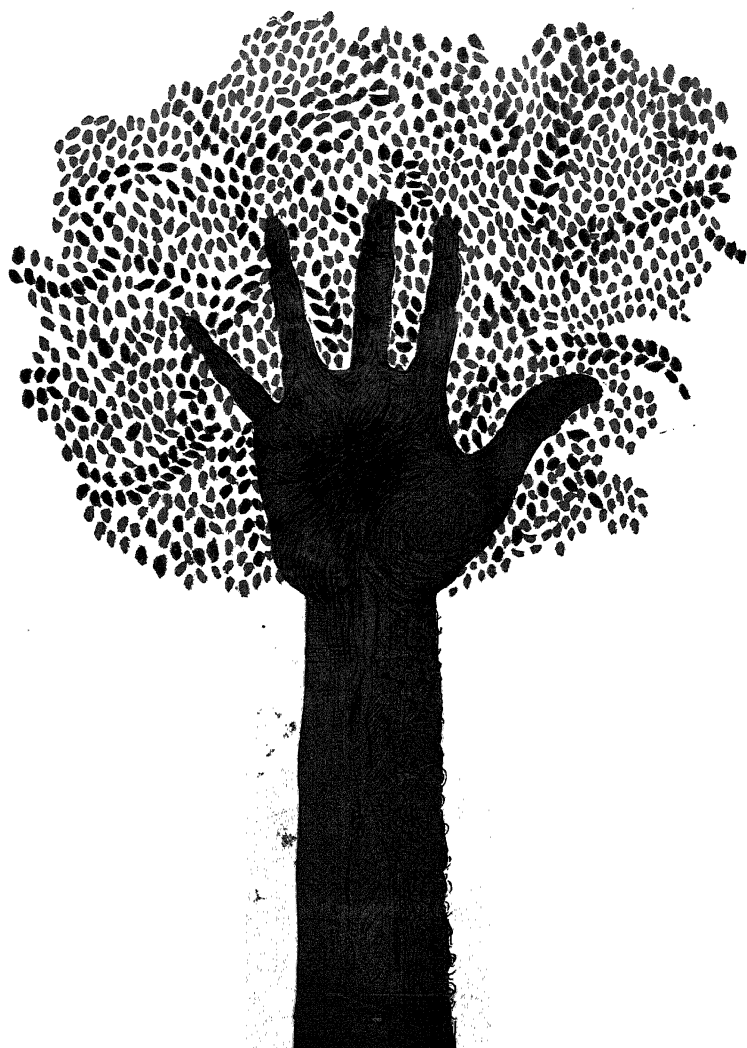


The Olive Grove

MARIA KUNCEWICZ



THE OLIVE GROVE is a new novel by one of the most distinguished living Polish writers. Maria Kuncewicz has been compared to Isak Dinesen, Jean Giraudoux, Gogol, Stendhal, Mauriac, Proust and many others, but only since the end of World War II, after she had come to live in the West, have translations of the work of this extraordinary author come to be available to English-speaking readers.

The story of THE OLIVE GROVE, suggested by a tragic incident which made headline news a decade ago, tells of an English family—David and Agnes Monroe, and their precocious daughter, Patricia—during a camping trip to the French Riviera. For David, it was a voyage into memory as he renewed contact with former colleagues in the Maquis. For Agnes it was a period of emotional awakening; for Patricia, of poetic discovery of the world about her. What none of them anticipated was the brutal reality which lay beyond the reach of the even most perceptive thought and the most sensitive feeling . . . the dark *primaeval* thing which rose out of the earth and slaughtered them.

Here are excerpts from a few of the extraordinary reviews of Maria Kuncewicz's earlier novels:

"Continuously exciting . . . formidably accomplished"

(Henry Reed, THE NEW STATESMAN)

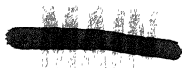
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jacket design by Ernie Socolov



3 1148 00329 4352

Kuncewiczowa, Maria 63-24139
(Szczepańska) 1897-
The olive grove. Walker and
Co. [1963] \$4.95



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DEC 1963

By The Same Author

THE STRANGER

THE KEYS

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE ABSENT

THE FORESTER

THE MODERN POLISH MIND (editor)

The Olive Grove

THE OLIVE GROVE

by
Maria Kuncewicz



WALKER AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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*Published simultaneously in Canada
by George J. McLeod, Limited, Toronto.*

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 63-11770

Manufactured in the United States of America

*On how to sing
the frog school and the skylark school
are arguing.*

*A tree frog, clinging
to a banana leaf —
and swinging, swinging.*

*The Firefly Hunt.
The lost child cries,
and as she cries, she clutches
at fireflies.*

(Japanese Haiku poetry)

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Author's Foreword

The fifth of August, 1952, ended in London in one of those summer evenings when English weather tries to make up in gentleness what it failed to provide in splendor. I had just come to see a friend in Queen's Gate. We sat in a Victorian room, with the door open on a terrace, sipping tea, saying little. When it was brought in, the evening paper for some time remained untouched. Then I read in it the ghastly story of the murder of a prominent British family in the South of France.

Why it became an obsession with me, I shall now try to explain. I must begin by declaring that never before had I heard the names of Sir Jack Drummond, his wife Anne, or their daughter Elizabeth. Their existence had run its course without my ever having been aware of it. Neither did Lurs near Forcalquier, with all its French residents and occasional strangers, sound particularly familiar.

In 1952 only seven years separated us from World War II. But that little girl who had run, under the lovely stars of Provence, from a man who wished to smash her skull, that child's lonely flight through darkness in a strange country, led deeper into human mystery than war itself.

Fascinated with this force that can change ordinary breadeaters into murderers, I traveled back home from Queen's Gate to Forest Hill, looking attentively at people: this force throbbed under their skins, it worked inside their brains.

Vivi lived in our house. She was ten. Through her I have come to love English little girls. She used to ask me: "But you won't turn horrible, will you?" By which she meant that I should not die. I stopped at her bedroom door, it was half open, I listened, she breathed evenly in her sleep, but to me she had already "turned horrible" since I realized that she was not safe under this, or any other, roof. At that moment Pat was born, immune to dying, a character in a book.

The next morning I began writing a novel about Pat Monroe's vacation in the South of France. To make it credible, of course, I had to give her a father and a mother, as well as situate the family's camping site in a neighborhood I knew better than Forcalquier. My interest was not in the authentic people in an authentic story; my interest lay entirely with that mysterious force changing tame creatures into beasts.

The time had long passed when I divided humanity into victims and criminals. In two world wars I have seen how History was taking charge of individual responsibilities, how Race, Nation, and Church were used to cover up personal obsessions, how the wrong people were slain for the wrong reasons, because love seemed too difficult a solution to human problems.

The murder at Lurs did not strike me as more brutal than many such crimes happening daily all over the world. I reacted so strongly because of Vivi. But, as I set out on my

search for motives which could induce people to kill any of her kind, I soon discovered that her life was merely a bubble on the surface of a deep bog. And the bog was made of layer upon layer of national prejudice, class hatred and personal misunderstanding. Into that bog, as a novelist, I felt impelled to probe.

Objections are raised against fiction writers dipping their pens in the blood and sweat of foreigners. Some critics would like to confine novelists to their own provinces, as if fiction were not a free-for-all country. An even stronger outcry is heard when authors resort in their work to a language which their own national readers do not currently understand, while foreigners consider it their exclusive property.

Of all this I was fully aware as I embarked—a Polish novelist—on writing in English an Anglo-French story. I took the chance in spite of the reservations. I took it, for I do not think that human understanding is a geographical notion. When the Lurs murder was committed, I had lived in England for eleven years, watching and befriending English people, listening to them. In France, particularly her peasant South, so persistently haunted by tramps and millionaires, I spent many months observing the uneasy symbiosis. Vivi's mind and Vivi's speech were English; I echoed the sound of her words.

It took me five years to write *The Olive Grove*. In the meantime the real case was judged in the French courts, a man was indicted, Jean Giono wrote a wonderful piece of reportage on the trial, there were sensational rumors, long-forgotten feuds were unearthed, and contradictory testimonies were deposed. None of these events affected my work. *The Olive Grove* is not an account of "The Dominici

Affair" set near Forcalquier; it is simply one more attempt at understanding tragedy. It is an attempt to stop in a busy street and listen to the voice of a child who does not want "to turn horrible," and to the silence of an old man condemned by History and Nature to be a tool of horror.

MARIA KUNCEWICZ

The Olive Grove



1

Tinsel Road lies in one of those easterly London suburbs, green and secretive, where people live who fail to meet the general standard not so much because of their morals as their oddity.

Elderly widows whose love for old-fashioned shrubs exceeded their wish for a good address had settled here, as had members of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals anxious to secure adequate homes for stray cats; owners of such dogs as do not approve of Hyde Park; proud possessors of mahogany pieces too big for modern elevators; dipsomaniacs averse to meeting their subordinates outside the office. There were also retired actresses given to the cult of Edward VII. Former officers of the former Allied Forces. Catholic nuns entrenched in their little kremlins of dogma; young couples seeking lower rents or obscurity or both, for reasons to be discussed by neighbors over an overgrown hedge. Children at last, less numerous and less noisy than in the more up-to-date boroughs of the metropolis.

In this eccentrics' own province, sprinkled with ruins

due to the hits and blasts of the Second World War, a few intruders go about their daily business of selling and buying, teaching, building, delivering and collecting, valeting and repairing.

But in the shady back gardens, unaware of any vulgar activity, fairies thrive on crumbs which the not-so-noisy children strew about for the robins. And a man in a funny hat pedals down the street on a bicycle, humming a happy tune.

Patricia Monroe was seven when she moved with her parents to the corner house in Tinsel Road. They had come from a flat in Chelsea, the mover was heard saying, and the contents of the van could hardly be expected to fill the Victorian mansion.

Mr. Dobson, the window cleaner, was the first local person to speak to Pat. "Miss," he said, "doesn't your mum know those windows are filthy?" Screened by the van from the sweaty men carrying furniture, they both stood near the open gate in the front garden.

Pat looked up at Mr. Dobson's hat which struck her as funny because it too was filthy.

"The first thing to do when you move into a place, Miss, is clean the windows," he insisted.

She watched him talk, and under a hatbrim hard with dirt and grease, his light eyes spoke clean, transparent truth.

Just then a commotion arose in the street; many cars hooting at once, dimly, plaintively, as if the horns were blown by unsure or frightened hands. Pat ran off to see. People scurried off the pavement while a line of automobiles, some heaped high with flowers and one in front

carrying a large box, drove slowly past. "What's that?" she asked.

"A funeral, Miss," the window cleaner explained. "They're taking the loved one to be buried or burnt."

She disliked the idea. "What about the flowers?"

"Oh, they'll be left at the cemetery."

"Won't they die soon without water?"

"Of course they will, Miss. Everything's bound to die." His voice was cheerful.

The next day Pat hung about Mr. Dobson in his filthy hat as he cleaned the windows in the huge empty drawing room. She could not forget the funeral. "Why do people die, Mr. Dobson?" she asked.

"They die because they're sick or very old, Miss," came the reply.

Since she was neither sick nor very old, she left it at that.

After the bedlam of Chelsea, where people poured out of every chink, the suburban house seemed a wilderness at first. The old friends were slow in acknowledging the change of address, and making new ones was not easy. Discouraged by an acre of grounds and rumors that the family was peculiar, the flame of neighborly interest soon flagged.

Still Pat liked it here. Autumn drifted into November with no fog and a lot of roses. One day as she was climbing a chestnut tree in the garden for "conkers," Miss Popp stopped in the street outside, and Miss Peep peeped in, waving a long purple glove. Their beautiful white faces under enormous hats turned up without a smile as they asked in one voice, "Have you seen Hamilcar passing by,

little girl? He is a tabby cat and some may think him ordinary, but he carries himself with great dignity. He left after breakfast, and it's luncheontime now."

Pat had never seen Hamilcar, but she said, "Oh, yes. I saw him going back home; he's very beautiful. You'll find him sitting on your doorstep, I think." She added the "I think" because otherwise her mother would have certainly called her answer a lie.

Peep, thrusting her long thin parasol with a lot of lace on it into the air, shrieked, "Indeed, indeed! That's what I think too, Belle! We shall find him sitting on our doorstep!" And off they rushed, jingling, tinkling their bracelets, waving long purple gloves, piping, "Thank you, oh, thank you, little girl! It's true, she has seen Hamilcar."

Of course Pat had seen Hamilcar. If one wants to see something, one does. It may not be what other people see, but it is certainly nicer. At night it was too dark to see Peep and Popp riding bicycles in the street. But since they never rode bicycles anyway, they might just as well ride them in the air over her bed. She chuckled as she watched them. With Peep and Popp carousing over her head she was not afraid of the night.

One day after school Pat perched on the top tier of the benches in the dilapidated conservatory, looking out through a broken pane, hoping to see Mr. Dobson rushing up Tinsel Road on his bike shouting, "Coo-coo!" He would be very welcome, for in the morning her parents had had a row. Coffee was spilled, the sugar basin was overturned, Father had left for the office looking glum, and her mother was still sulking.

Pat was used to minding her own business, staying out

of big people's way. She had had her tea without so much as a look at her mother and had crept back into the garden to play. But it was late afternoon now; she was tired of playing and she hoped Mr. Dobson would come joke with her.

Suddenly, right outside the window, someone cried, "Martin! Quick! I've found our Patsy!" She saw a woman's big, laughing mouth painted fuchsia-red seeming to blow a kiss and calling her "honey." Then there also appeared a young man. "Hullo, Patricia. Don't you remember us?" he asked. "This is your cousin Cynthia, and I'm her little brother—your cousin too!"

Taken aback, she looked them over. "You're not a little brother," she scoffed. "You're a man, that's all."

The man beamed. "All right, Patricia. Have it your own way. Still I am your cousin and Cynthia's brother Martin, see?"

The woman coaxed, "Surely you remember how we called on you once in Chelsea—you were just a little girl then—and Uncle David, the old anarchist, kicked us out before we could make proper friends with you. D'you think it was easy for us to find you again in this big city?"

Well, yes, now that Pat thought of it, she did remember something. Her father had hissed like an adder. "Sssorry . . . I musst ask you two to leave this house at once!" Mum had muttered uncomfortably, "Stop it, David, please! They are Pat's cousins after all. . . ." And the two visitors had retreated toward a big glossy car, giggling and exclaiming, "Why are you so angry, Uncle David?" It had been so absurd, so fast, like Donald Duck shooting through the skies in a bucket. She had not been at all sure Cynthia and Martin were real. Soon after she had asked her father, "Dad, why

did you turn out those people Mum said were my cousins? Were they wicked, or fairies, or something?" He had pulled one of his ugly faces and said, "Cousins or no cousins, if fairies you must have, these certainly were the Two Wicked Ones."

So now, here they stood again in front of her. "Yes, I remember you," she finally owned up. "You're my cousins-after-all." But she stepped down in case they should try to snatch her and do something wicked to her.

This made Cynthia laugh. "She's afraid we'll kidnap her, Martin."

Martin also laughed, but in a quieter way. Pat stared hard at him. As you looked at his face it became nicer and nicer till it beamed like a dog's. "You know you're lovely, don't you, honey?" he drawled. "And we're bent on having you with us in France—"

At this Pat retreated a step, and they both squealed, "Don't run away!" and began to talk very fast.

Cynthia said, "You see, honey, your father hates us because he's the younger son. Our papa was the Earl. And when Martin's of age he'll of course come into Trusfield. It's all wrong for you to be kept in the dark like this about family affairs—"

"But Patricia," Martin interrupted. "Your father can have Trusfield as far as I'm concerned. All I want is to be Cynthia's younger brother and live abroad. Besides, the Abbey is much nicer, and easier to run."

"What is the Abbey?" Pat asked.

"What? Don't you even know *that*?" they exclaimed.

"It's a house in France," Martin said. "The American aunt we stayed with during the war when we were kids—well, she wasn't an aunt, not really; she was our mother's

fan—You know at least that our mother is Beryl Bobo, the film star? Oh, you don't? How sweet! Well, when she died—Miss Higgett, that is—she left the Abbey to Cynthia. . . . We have vines there, and jasmines, an olive grove. The frogs in a pool nearby say, 'Old man! Green man! Bad man!' In France only frogs speak English, you know. . . . And in the evening there are swarms of fireflies, as big as headlamps. The French call them *les lucioles*. Come stay at the Abbey one day, honey! There'll be just the three of us—"

"Pat, Paat! Your father's home!" Pat's mother called. "He wants you for your French lesson!"

The cousins opened their mouths as if to say, "Oh! French lessons . . . oh!" and their eyes grew big with terror or amusement. They began to back away, putting fingers to their lips. "Shshsh . . . don't tell him. Bye . . . Bye until next time!"

They were about to climb into the same glossy car. Then Martin came back, leaping across the road, his face twitching with laughter. "The race of older sons is dying out, honey, so never you worry about your father not being one." He whispered it as if it were a funny secret. "Understand?"

Pat frowned and went inside for her French lesson. Since they were dying out, she felt very sorry for the older sons.

Winter passed without an opportunity for discussion of really important matters with her father. They met only seldom at the table, and when they met she was asked questions about school and her cough. At other times, during their rigorously kept appointments for French lessons, there

was so much bother about the silent *e* and the rolling *r* that talk about anybody's dying had to wait.

Sometimes on Sundays the family spent the day together: Agnes, her mother; David, her father; and Pat, herself. They went places, and things were pointed out such as the Queen's own swans on a somewhat dirty canal in Maida Vale; an inn where a Mr. Dickens used to dine on a pewter plate; and a church whose bells said "Oranges and lemons."

All this left little room for discussion of funerals and cousins.

Mr. Dobson was the only one good at proper conversation. Always he had plenty of time, and she tried never to miss his window-cleaning calls. As he put it, everything—even dying—was nice, because of that person Jesus Christ, who long, long ago had died, but then got up from his grave on the third morning and had been alive ever since.

Spring came in like a roaring lion, but Mr. Dobson soon tamed it. He gave Pat a hedgehog to keep in a box in the conservatory and feed on milk. Scarcely before she knew it, the hedgehog developed into a fairy. And then he married a peony. They had babies which were invisible. (Pat said *in-vi-sable*.) These were noisy and sweet, although filthy. Mr. Dobson never doubted what she told him about the hedgehog family. On the contrary, he was always reporting to her other *in-vi-sable* goings on in the garden which he surveyed as he cleaned the neighbors' windows while she was at school.

"How could you see the babies kissing the peony?" she asked. "They're *in-vi-sable*."

"Oh, I 'ave my own ways of seeing what I shouldn't, Miss," he said with a wink.

What with the hedgehog getting lost at least once a day and fairies pretending to be flowers, Pat did not mind the rain or the wind. To lure her indoors after school became quite a proposition, and that was how she caught a bad cold.

A doctor was called. He stared and stared at her. He even peered into her throat. He was a stranger, and yet he told her mother to undress her. Pat clung to her pajamas, but she was stripped. Then she had to suffer a hairy paw kneading her all over. Never before had a stranger's hand touched her in that rude way. She hated her mother's prompting her to obey what he was ordering her to do: "Now breathe deeply, child; now hold your breath; say, 'Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet. . . .'"

Her hope was that her father would come in and put an end to whatever this was. But when he arrived he smiled at the doctor, blinked at her mother, and stuck his thumb up. It made her feel no longer at home in her room. But having a bad cold was being sick, so she let the rude man have his way; she did not want to die.

He produced a thing with a needle out of his bag. He said he was going to give her a shot to make her well, and that it wouldn't hurt. He did. And it hurt a lot. She did not cry; she only asked, "I'll never die now, Mum, shall I?"

Her mother kissed her, but the man smirked. "I'm afraid we can't promise you that, young lady."

"Why not?"

The hairy paw gave her a pat on her cheek, and he was gone.

Her parents seemed to think this was an ordinary eve-

ning. But nothing was ordinary any longer. Even their voices sounded queer since they had sided with the doctor—like an engine's, or a pig's—and Pat thought with regret of the ordinary days that were past. When she asked for *Through the Looking Glass*, her father said she was too big for such fairytale stuff. What he did not know was that fairies were often bigger than he and could be cleverer and stronger.

It never failed to surprise her that her mother and father could not see what she saw. Her mother would come in and stare at the spot where the *other's* gaze looked out and say, "Oh, there's that medicine bottle. . . ."

It was getting late. Her father David and her mother Agnes were having supper downstairs, or were, perhaps, fighting in the big bed. It was no good longing for them; they were different, they could not see the invisible things.

The next time Mr. Dobson came around to do the windows she asked him, "Do you want to live forever, Mr. Dobson?"

He blew on the pane and wiped out his breath with his sleeve. "Of course I do, Miss. What's the 'indrance? I've not murdered anybody, 'ave I? And I still 'ave to meet the fellow as can clean a window better than I do. Just look 'ere! Isn't the room lovely now?"

"But you said everything's bound to die, Mr. Dobson."

"Oh, well. . . . Depends on 'ow you look at it. Of course your body's bound to die. But if you do no 'arm to nobody your soul is sure to fly off after you die to even better places than we know of 'ere. Say the Delectable Mountains, the Celestial City, and such like. A nice clean

kid like you? Phew! You'll live 'appily ever after, and no mistake, Miss."

As soon as her father returned home that day she cornered him. "Dad! The doctor said he can't promise I'll never die, but Mr. Dobson says I'll live even if I'm dead. What d'you think, Dad?"

He ruffled his hair and smiled. "Well, pup, I'm sorry; I'm rather of the doctor's opinion. . . ."

"Oh, but he's an old *anarchist*, Dad—" she interrupted, and he started.

"Who taught you that word? I'm sure you don't understand its meaning."

Since Cynthia had called her father this for having kicked her out of the flat, Pat could not possibly explain to him that it meant a rude man, so she just murmured, "I'm sorry. I won't say it again."

Her father nodded. "That's better. These are not matters for little girls. And it is a bit early anyway for you to worry about death. Life is very long. There are many things to see yet, and many places to go. How would you like to go to France and get rid of your bronchitis?"

2

They were driving up a narrow lane to the village Agnes had marked with a little cross on the map of the French Riviera. David went into low gear. The asphalt sputtered with pebbles as the station wagon climbed in circles higher

and higher up the winding road, while green, blue, and gold, like a peacock's tail, the valley revolved below. He braked at the spot where a signpost read *Domaine Monroe*. Then he parked off the road and asked for the picnic basket. The grass was sprinkled with white little stars. "These are asphodels," he said. "The same sort of stuff Dante used to walk on in *The Divine Comedy*."

This made English tea seem out of place, and with a flourish Agnes put a bottle of claret on the asphodels. They drank wine, while Pat was given milk and bananas. She disliked both, and turned to spelling *Domaine Monroe* for herself, instead of drinking and eating. After a while she asked, "What does Monroe mean in French, Daddy?"

"The same as in English, Pat. Our name."

"Does it mean we have a house here too?"

He smiled a crooked smile. "Places live longer than people, Pat. This place used to be my father's. After his death it went to my sister. And after your Aunt Mary died your grandmother sold it to an Argentinian banker."

"Is it a horrible place then?"

She hoped he would say No, but he said, "They made it horrible for me, Pat," and took to the bottle again. His head thrown back, two fat, blue veins stood out on both sides of his neck as he drank. His eyes were hidden behind thick lids, and a ping-pong ball throbbed inside his throat. Was the little boy still playing inside him, Pat wondered. "Who were *they*?" she asked.

He did not hear her; he was talking to her mother. "It was Easter time," he was saying, "and I had just come back to the *Domaine* from my Swiss school. By the way, Agnes, don't think I'm drunk just because I've never treated you to that story before. It's this place . . . never mind. What was

I saying? Ah, yes . . . my school. Father had come, too, from London. At lunch we were discussing next summer's vacation. It was then he told me, 'My dear Davvie, you know you should not think of Trusfield Hall as your home; it will be John's.' I was about twelve, and of course I did know. I shouted, 'But Father, Mary doesn't let me ride the donkey here, she doesn't let me pick the tangerines! She says it's all hers, and I'm not to stare at her . . . !'

Pat now stared at her own father, thinking: by "Father" he means, of course, Grandfather, the Earl. I've never seen Grandfather. He's dead for good. He never waked up in the morning. I wish I could run up and see what sort of France is behind that wall across the road—Dad's France or Cynthia's France? In her mind's eye she saw Cynthia's wide, laughing, fuchsia mouth with glistening teeth and Martin's face, as nice as a dog's. Since her father still hated her cousins, his must be a different France; a France packed with lessons and medicine bottles, without *les lucioles*, without the Abbey and the olive grove. . . .

"Pat," her mother cried, and threw a rug at her. "You stretch out now and try to take a nap. It'll be a long day for you, you know."

Reluctantly, Pat took the rug behind a flowering bush where she imagined they would not see her, but they did. She was made to lie down in the shade while her father still talked.

"You know what my father's answer was, Agnes? 'Don't you worry, son, you'll be given an excellent education.'"

Agnes chuckled. "You know I loved the old man."

"D'you really think it was decent of him, Agnes, to tear you away, an unsuspecting child, from the village green and thrust you into a school for snobby idiots—just because his

lordship felt like playing Father Christmas to his housekeeper's offspring?"

"Well, I wonder if later on you'd have played Pygmalion to me if I were an Eliza Doolittle. . . ."

"Oh, I like rough clay. The old man thought his Father Christmas act would prevent me from going to Spain to join the Reds, that's all."

He flung the empty bottle into the ditch, and turned a disaffected gaze on his wife. "Anyway," he said, "the door to the Monroe world was closed to me rather early." He began to whistle, then sent a rock after the bottle. "It was closed that same memorable summer . . . on the day I overheard my mother say I should never've been born; because, she said, if they hadn't been so engrossed in their Benjamin—that's me—they'd never have let Mary join the Ambulance Brigade, and she would not have been disfigured."

Pat glanced furtively at the signpost with the name *Domaine Monroe* written on it, to see if there was a closed door somewhere on the other side, and a string of fathers and mothers stretching beyond it into the blue.

There was nothing of the kind; only on this side her own mother sitting on Dante's asphodels, nibbling at a biscuit, rebuking her husband.

"It isn't fair, David, to say the door was closed to you. Your mother loves you. And whatever your ideas were, your brother always tried to be friendly. His wife . . . well, you can't expect people to star in Hollywood and stay sane. But Beryl's not a bad woman. Wasn't it you who cut her because she wasn't a lady?"

"Oh, shut up," he shrugged her off. "I never cut her. It's just that I can't stand that blend of feudalism and his-

tronics. What's the good of being an older son if one hasn't the guts to marry a prig, or an American heiress? Now their father's dead, what do Cynthia and Martin contribute to the Trusfield tradition? They are a pair of cosmopolitan spivs."

Pat was getting bored. "Where am I?" she said in a sleepy voice. "What's the palaver about?"

"Ah, so you're not asleep any longer, you little beast." Agnes sprang to her feet. "Tell us what your first dream was in France."

"Daddy . . ."—Pat ignored her—"I dreamt of something *spivs*. Where do they live in France? Is it far from here?"

Agnes started, but David, looking mad and absent at the same time, did not seem to hear. Pat had no wish for her father to be mad and absent while they were on the road in a foreign country; she had to draw him out.

"Daddy!" she called, "the race of older sons is dying out! Didn't you know?"

He jerked his head, stung.

"What's that? Who told you so, Pat?"

She got up, putting on the babyish air they loved, began to skip and to chant "Someone told me so, told me so, told me so. . . ."

As they now busied themselves tucking away the basket back into the car, she could at last come closer to the wall.

Like green hens with ruffled feathers, prickly plants sat on it, basking in the afternoon sun.

"What's behind the wall, Daddy?" She tugged at his sleeve.

"Nothing much, Pat. A tool shed. They call it a

cabanon. A ruin called the Abbey where only owls and bats live. . . .”

“How d’you know only owls and bats live there?”

“I know because after I was parachuted into France during the war, I lay sick for weeks on end in that *cabanon*, looking at that ruin.” He gave her a playful dig in the ribs. “I don’t think anyone but vermin would choose to live there even now, pup.”

They were already some way off up the road when she asked another question. “I suppose there are many places in France called the Abbey where only spivs live, aren’t there, Dad?”

No answer. They drove slowly uphill.

“What’s that smell, David? Could it be orange blossoms?” Agnes inhaled so hard her nose sharpened.

“Mary’s tangerines should be in blossom now.”

On the right above the road a big square mansion with a flat roof and weather-beaten shutters emerged from a tangle of palms and wisteria. “This actually is Villa Monroe,” he said.

“Stop, David, stop! I want to see it!”

“Daddy, stop!” Pat bounced on the seat.

He rushed on.

“After that Vichyite took a pot shot at me, as I came to the next morning, I was feverish. . . . I remember an olive branch swaying across the *cabanon*’s open arch. I knew Mother and Mary were not at the villa—still, to me the branch looked for all the world like an old woman’s arm beckoning me. I thought I heard a girl scream. . . . I nearly called: ‘Go away, Mary! I don’t want to see your wretched face!’” He chuckled.

“Oh, come on, David, you’ve had too much wine,

really. Poor Mary. . . . Won't you let Pat have a look at where she lived?"

"My dear, that house is dead, too. The Argentinian doesn't live there; to him it's just an investment. Besides, I can see Pat has gone to sleep again."

"What about me?"

"You? You be thankful, old girl, you were not part of that world."

"Oh, but that's not true!" her voice brightened. "I am and always was part of your world."

"Don't shout, then. Women in my world don't."

"Oh, yes, they do. You said yourself your sister did when her fiancé sent her packing. Cynthia, I must say, shrieks when she sees you. That's what's wrong with you, David. You believe in one class, but not one world. Well, I loved the trees in Trusfield Park."

"Oh, you loved the trees. And the fact that your mother was not allowed to collect sticks in that one world of yours, has, of course, never disturbed your serene mind."

"Nnno . . . I was never bent on saving the world; I just loved it. The odd thing is, I still do."

"All right. You love it, and you don't save it. And what you call the world is simply your own life. Well, the people who saved my life for me are Pierre and Mauricette. I don't want to miss my appointment with them."

The car whizzed around the hill on the serpentine road, and Villa Monroe was revealed from the other side. With no creepers at its back it looked leprous. An overgrown vineyard tumbled down the slope in ragged terraces. Like old mirrors, wells glimmered blindly among Biblical trees. But where the vineyard ended at the bottom of a ravine, a path climbed to what seemed a different country in

a different time: terraces clad smoothly in lawns, garden chairs, colorful parasols, fans spreading a diamond mist among clumps of irises. Step by step a traveler's gaze went up to a gravel court bordered with enormous jars of geraniums, and at the far end of it, a cloister, perhaps an ancient farmhouse, its walls newly plastered a dusty pink, its shuttered windows sparse and uneven. Behind its bead curtain, the narrow entrance door probably stood ajar as the strings moved gently in the breeze. On a stone bench lay a big *Provençal* hat and a camera.

As he accelerated, David glanced furtively at the pink house, then into the mirror.

"You awake, Patsy? You might have been right after all; the Abbey looks lived in now."

Pat was only half-awake. Faces, bottles, fireflies, and older sons were closing in tighter and tighter on her. "To France . . . to go . . . *lucioles* . . . to go . . . just the three of us," someone whispered in her ear. Which three? She sank deeper and deeper into the French pool of English-speaking frogs. Dad, Mum, and me? Or Cynthia, Martin, and me? Which France?

A cart driven by a mule in a jingling harness and a smart, little hat appeared from behind a curve in the road, making her jump. She was reminded of Peep and Popp as they trotted, their bangles tinkling, along Tinsel Road, while Mr. Dobson, with his filthy hat glued on his head at a funny angle, cleaned the conservatory windows.

"Daddy," she said. "How did those French people save your life? Did they give you a pill to purge your sins?"

"Oh, I see! Mr. Dobson has been treating her to his own version of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Agnes! Well, no, Pat . . .

not exactly a pill. Just bread. French people are not educated at Sunday school."

Agnes cried, "Look, look!" pointing to a stone enclosure built into a rock below the road. A swarm of creatures with wings, half-wrapped in stony folds, were sitting, kneeling, standing there motionless, on slabs of marble among the black flames of cypresses. "A cemetery. Aren't the angels beautiful?"

Pat disagreed. "They are rude. Fairies wouldn't ever sit in their undies near a road, for everybody to stare at them."

"Splendid! Isn't she a brave little puritan, Agnes?" David crowed.

3

Pierre Varioli had been about ten years old when he jumped the wall into Monroe Park one morning and headed for the cherries in the orchard; being English property, this was considered no man's land in the village.

Behind its curtain of cypresses the villa was scarcely visible, and its owners seemed like persons in a book, somebody's invention. He could still remember the shock of suddenly discovering two people sitting on a bench under a cedar tree. They were women, but they were not real.

Under a large Panama hat the face of the younger one was plaster-white. As she turned to the sun, he could see that purple scars, like worms, had eaten into her cheeks

beneath the coat of powder. Her mouth had an old body's twist, but her eyes stared with wild wistfulness at the world around. Pierre dropped his basket; the face shook on its long neck, shedding a spicy perfume, the odor of a ghastly flower.

He stood there transfixed. The older woman, a big gray-haired doll dressed up in lacy finery, seemed to guard the worm-eaten one. If sinister, both appeared ravishingly beautiful to him because of their luxuriousness.

That was where the gardener found him, and took him and his basket of stolen cherries to face "the milord."

A pink-faced gentleman with yellow whiskers emerged from the pit of a club chair; he wore a chamois waistcoat and an air of endless embarrassment. He heard the gardener out, smiled, and handed Pierre a ten-franc note, stammering in funny French: "Very bad, very bad. . . . Mustn't do it again."

Thus made rich without any exertion on his part, Pierre ran away in a greater panic than if he had been thrashed.

In later years he often dreamed of Domaine Monroe, and in his waking hours he collected every bit of gossip about its inhabitants. The parish priest was all praise for "the milord's" liberalities, and girls were killing themselves trying to get jobs with the English, yet everybody loathed them in their splendid isolation.

Since she was a victim of war and unrequited love, the farmers' wives expected the young lady to shed a few tears in front of them, make a few wild gestures, wistfully ask the name of somebody's child. . . . None of these things did she do.

The kitchenmaids reported how the old lady made them put honest-to-goodness French bread into the oven to

be sterilized because the local baker's hands had touched it. During an epidemic of grippe, the English quarantine became so stiff that parcels had to be hoisted on rods over the wall for servants to unhook them in the yard.

In Pierre's young days he had had few opportunities to observe other foreigners in the streets of Nice and Cannes; and so when the wounded "Captain Smith" was eventually entrusted to his care, he took him to the *cabanon* on the outskirts of Domaine Monroe, the land of freaks where the English belong. And, indeed, the way the man said "Pardon me" as he fainted after an injection was given him in the vein, his abstemiousness, the inexplicable means he had of keeping his body clean while weak as a chicken, the never-changing pitch of his voice, the impersonal smile—all about him was somehow reminiscent of those lean figures in tweeds, or else wearing monocles and spats, who had once stalked along the Promenade des Anglais in the silent company of ladies in flowering hats.

After leaving Smith one thought about him, but his actual presence was so immaterial that Pierre took to making love to Mauricette in front of him. The Englishman, when feverish, had, if they were not otherwise engaged, entertained them volubly on politics; his accent was amusing, and his ideas were absurd. It all sounded poetic; Mauricette loved listening to his tale of a classless society and international brotherhood. And, while fondling her breasts, Pierre enjoyed communism, too. But they would have given a great deal to have the Englishman drunk and candid about his love affairs and family background. Unfortunately Smith scarcely drank. And so, when the time came for them to part, Pierre was fairly well acquainted

with Bakunin and Marx, yet as ignorant of Smith's life as before.

Shortly thereafter, Louis, the commandant of his unit, took him on a sabotage assignment to a railway tunnel near Toulon. In his nervous haste Pierre brought the wrong fuses, the plan had to be abandoned, and a violent argument flared up. As they all swore and recriminated, someone yelled "*Les Fritz! A patrol on the road!*" Chaotic shooting ensued. The "German patrol" proved to be the lorry, painted a camouflage-green, of a Parisian refugee mechanic. Before the misunderstanding could be cleared up both Pierre and Louis were badly hit.

At last liberation came. Although the Toulon tunnel had eventually been blown up, no one seemed to know for sure who had done it. Some mentioned a mustachioed lone wolf by the name of Henri. He never claimed the honor, and so all the glory went to the two invalids connected with the initial attempt: Louis, who lost a leg, and Pierre, who emerged from the hospital with but one arm. Wearing the medal of the Resistance he marched in the victory parade next to Louis, who hobbled on his crutches, the *Croix de guerre* resplendent on his breast, while Mauricette proudly looked on.

Well, Mauricette was a poor man's daughter; yet her perfumed curls, her rustling frocks, her pert little nose, brought richness into Pierre's life. His mother's bald scalp, which she candidly displayed on hot days, had haunted his youth. There was nothing pretty, nothing young and cheerful in his home. On Sunday afternoons he used to catch the bus to Nice and there, with constricted throat, gape for hours at the glamour girls sipping drinks on the terrace at Queenie's, or stalking on high heels up the steps to the

Ruhl. He was twenty-two when, in the midst of wartime drabness, he met her—*La Clocharde*, as she was called for her carefree ways. She worked at a hairdresser's in Grasse. With hair piled high on her small head, she walked the streets of their native village, whiffs of perfume lingering in her wake. She it was who introduced him to a group of important people, a cell in the *Maquis*. They came from all walks of life; some low, but some so splendid that under normal circumstances he could never have dreamed of meeting them on equal terms.

After the war, one of them, a lawyer, gave him a job as a messenger at a meager salary. On this Pierre and Mauricette married. For some time they lived with her parents, a curtain screening off a corner in the potter's shed for them. There their son Paul was born. Curls became undone. Perfume evaporated. A young Varioli was reared in squalor, away from the family pew in the village church. Only one person, Pierre's mother, Mme. Titine, sneaked in and out of the shed, carrying tidbits for her grandson, and news.

One evening after work, Pierre was sitting alone in his corner when she stormed in. She was sobbing, invoking the help of the saints, her kerchief like a black sail against the wind. The widow of a neighbor who had owned a nearby jasmine field wanted to sell the field as a building site. Old Varioli was in a rage; nothing could infuriate him more than the prospect of having a retired shopkeeper from Paris build a suburban villa on his doorstep. He threatened to burn his own house, but burnt his wife's *perruques* instead, and here she sat in the drafty shed, trembling, resting on her son's empty sleeve that miserable head which typhoid fever had robbed of its crowning glory long ago. "Ah, my

poor child," she wailed. "How I wish I had not offered my dear *Maman's* string of pearls to Notre Dame de Laghet! She never deigned to make my hair grow again, and now there is nothing I can sell to help your father buy that wretched field! Of course he wants me to waste my Aunt Matilde's inheritance on it! How can I? He swears he will disinherit you for marrying against his wish; I must keep some money to help you when I die." She became hysterical. "He jeers at you, *mon chéri*! He says, 'If Aunt Matilde's money is sacred, perhaps your clever son—' that is you, *mon pauvre chou*—'can produce some that is not.'"

For the first time in his adult life Pierre kissed his mother without aversion; they were both caught in the same net of ugliness.

The next day he walked up to the Abbey at dusk. Wire fencing ran along the border line between the Monroe park and the Abbey grounds. Across the lane a signpost read: *Private Road. Trespassers will be prosecuted.* The secret passage from the grotto down to the cave looked unexplored.

In the rusty tin he found the English treasure, complete, where he had buried it on the eve of Smith's departure. As he unearthed it the half-forgotten scene came back to him with uncanny vividness.

Smith had looked worn and haggard that evening. His wound had healed, but for lack of proper food and exercise, his whole frame seemed to have shrunk, and his face expressed grief rather than satisfaction at its being his last day in France. Before dawn of the next day, Pierre was to take him to the back door of a *bistro* in the port at St. Raphael where an officer from an English submarine would be waiting for them, dressed as a fisherman.

Smith surprised Pierre by handing him a packet of money intended for underground headquarters; the liaison to whom he had planned to give it had not arrived. Pierre urged him to entrust it to the British officer instead. "For God's sake, don't make me responsible for all that money. I may be killed before the Marseilles man turns up, and then what?"

"Then what?" Smith switched on him a grin that looked silly to Pierre. "Well, that is obvious enough. *La Clocharde* will smuggle the money over to H.Q."

"Do you trust girls so much?" he had asked. "*La Clocharde* is poor. And she likes new dresses, you know."

They had thus argued for a while, then darkness fell, and Pierre went off to bury the fund temporarily in an Abbey cave.

Two years later, when he came back to look for it, his was far from a clear conscience. He had thought of the money often, but had never reported it to H.Q. Was it sacred? In any case, he was its guardian till an occasion arose to put it into the right hands. The right hands never presented themselves.

Before he began digging, his heart had bled for his mother. But when the rusty box disgorged its contents he wished he had never retrieved it from its dirty grave.

Shortly after this he and Mauricette moved to the farm, where his father greeted them with calm dignity. To Pierre's former room in the loft another cubicle was added in the guise of a kitchen, a gas stove was installed inside a fireplace, a mirror dimmed by age was hung over the mantel. Their luck had obviously changed. Enthralled with her promotion to the landowning class, Mauricette was not con-

cerned with explanations as to how it had all come about; she and Pierre returned obliviously to their love-making.

In proper time, another child, a girl, was added to the family, and the troubled days of the Resistance seemed finally forgotten.

In a pleasant way Pierre was reminded of them again when his *Maquis* comrade, the lawyer, recommended him for a job as butler to an American client of his. Miss Higgett was old, but of a juvenile disposition. To find people and things worth while, she had to think of them as unusual. Nobody could have pleased her better in the part of butler than a maimed hero of the Resistance.

After Pierre was established in her household, she promptly presented him with the limb he had missed for so long. Next came an electric pressure cooker for Mauricette, a Davy Crockett outfit for Paul, and a pink perambulator for the new baby. She also demanded to be taken to the farm. She found the hygienic conditions in the house abominable, and asked old Varioli's permission either to put in sanitation for her protégés, or else let them live with her at the Abbey.

The dust had scarcely settled behind her car when Baptiste swore that anyone who spent a night under the roof of the "American hag" would never set foot on his ground again. Mme. Titine gripped her husband's arm, begging her "rabbit" not to upset himself, but Pierre cried, "If that's how you speak of a person who's taking better care of a French veteran than France ever did, I don't want to spend another night under *your* roof, Father!"

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he said, and a flash passed under his bushy eyebrows. "I shan't keep

you. But it won't take long for people to discover what sort of French veteran Varioli Junior is."

A week later a cable arrived at the Abbey from Paris that left Pierre in command of the place, Miss Higgett flying off to the States on what she said would be a short business trip. She never came back; she was killed in a motor accident.

Pierre stayed on. The solicitor friend kept on handing over checks for the upkeep of the French property as instructed by terms of the will. All else was going equally well: Mauricette expected still another child; the jasmine field flourished; Mme. Titine had a new *perruque*; old Varioli showed signs of attachment to Paul—but Pierre's peace of mind was gone.

He wracked his brain trying to guess how much his father knew about the tunnel affair, and whether Mauricette still assumed Aunt Mathilde's inheritance had been used to finance the jasmine deal.

In their moments of intimacy, she had an exasperating way of calling forth memories. "You embraced me just like this," she would say, "the day we brought a fresh lot of bandages for Smith." Or: "Do not look at me like that. . . . Your eyes seem to ask impossible questions just as the Smith did when he was running high temperature. . . ." Whenever a letter was brought to the farm Pierre shuddered lest the stamp be English.

Instead there came another telegram saying that the Abbey had been bequeathed to Miss Cynthia Monroe who was now sailing to France to take possession, and would M. Pierre Varioli please keep everything in good shape for her.

By the end of the month she had indeed arrived, in the

company of her younger brother, and a leaf was turned in Pierre's history; an old one, as it turned out, bringing him back to the Domaine Monroe where something more, or perhaps less, than beauty—glamour? mystery?—was first revealed to him by two women under a cedar tree.

4

Ever since Cynthia Monroe had touched the bead curtain over the Abbey entrance door, that door had been a sort of aeolian harp for Pierre. It had two melodies to play: "She is in." "She is out." His mood changed accordingly from excitement to boredom. Too chic for Miss Higgett, the house melted into an insignificant background each time Mlle. Cynthia came in sight.

Somehow from the first she had turned his mind toward his childish vision of splendor: the forbidden cherries, an invisible peacock's cry, expensive women dressed in unreality.

He had never questioned Mademoiselle about a possible relationship to the next-door Domaine. Bearing the name Grimaldi there were on the *Côte d'Azur* houses, squares, and streets which did not belong to the family Grimaldi. The name Monroe was not uncommon; there had been no need to connect an American heiress with the "Lady Mary who was disfigured through love." But then a letter arrived on the farm on a spring morning, shocking him into misgivings. So the Englishman, the Captain Smith,

le capitaine whom he and Mauricette had befriended during the war, had also all the time been one David Monroe. For the name to emerge like this from two different spheres of strangeness seemed weird.

He darted to where Cynthia was lounging in the Abbey garden. "Mademoiselle, have you heard of someone of the name of David Monroe?" He thrust the letter under her nose, and she glanced through it with an air of happy astonishment, her customary response to a novel situation. "Of course. He's my uncle," she said, then added, as she read on, "Pat's a gem. I'm sorry she had bronchitis so badly, but you must not tell Mr. David Monroe we are here, Pierre." Her voice deepened, and then in a lighter tone: "Do you think you can help them with the camping site?"

Ducking into the pool she swam up to Martin who was reading, stretched out on the lawn. "Pat's coming!" she cried. "More kidnaping in sight for us, darling!"

She said it in English, but Pierre understood the word "kidnaping." He thought, The whole affair is of no interest to her since she did not even wait for me to answer her question. What was that about kidnaping though? The opaqueness of things foreign enfolded him. There was no mention in the letter of the treasure deposited with him. Yet the coincidences were strange; the enchanted Monroe world was becoming a jungle.

As usual on a Sunday afternoon, Baptiste Varioli sipped his *vin de propriétaire* under the trellis, while his grandson Paul read to him—laboriously and with much yawning—the story of the seventeenth-century English intrigue in France as described by Edmond Ladoucette in the voluminous *récit historique* titled *Le Masque de Fer*.

In his young days Baptiste, one of five boys in a much-respected farming family, had often been sent to the Lérins Isles with a cargo of the best virgin oil and the *vino santo* for the altar, pious offerings of the farm to the St. Honorat monastery. The local legend had it that at Fort Ste. Margueritte on the other island the noble-hearted brother of Louis XIV, a victim of English plotting, his face locked in an iron mask, was held prisoner before the dark powers had thrown him into the Bastille in Paris.

The monks never failed to treat young Baptiste to their liqueurs which he drank without a smile, his mind under the influence of alcohol yielding readily to somber visions. Before turning sail for the mainland he liked to sit on a rock watching the sea, brooding over its shifting movement, as it stretched so wide and deep, and yet would not separate France from her enemies. He hated the foreign ships, blamed God for not sinking them, yet he envied some people's freedom to leave home and go spread their misery across water and earth. He also looked at seaweed that clung to fisherman's boats, and saw red hair.

Lucia, the foundling, a young charge of the Ste. Brigitte Sisters, had red hair. She was shy but willing, and as they met at his suggestion in a shop where she was buying for the convent, her eyes had promised him much happiness. On this promise he had built dreams sky-high which crumbled at night into a hell of gluttonous desire. He had spoken to one of the sisters, and she had beamed approval on condition of his father's consent. But his father had laughed hilariously as he heard Baptiste's stammerings on the subject; a foundling was not to be mentioned as a farmer's prospective daughter-in-law. Baptiste had revolted. He had tried to see the prioress. He had found closed doors

and faces sealed with charitable smiles. Never again had the red-haired Lucia been seen shopping without a stern older sister at her heels. And a few months later Baptiste had known the agony of watching his love being wedded to another. The same shy and eager promise had shone in Lucia's eyes as she was leaving the altar as the bride of a Corsican baker.

Baptiste had abhorred since the streets of his village where at any corner that warm, ever bolder smile, could now emerge from a day or a night owned by the happy husband. Then rumors had spread about the couple moving to some other place. Afraid of himself Baptiste became a lone wolf, given to sulky meditation.

He was sitting like this on the pier at Ste. Margueritte one evening when he heard a female cry. It was a prolonged blood-chilling whine punctuated with shrieks. He jumped and hurled himself up the stone grades of an ancient street leading to where that sufferer was obviously calling for help.

By the time he reached the spot the shrieks had subsided into sobbing. The entrance door of the house was not locked. He pushed it and found himself in a murky, vaulted room. Beaten down, shielding her head with her arms, a woman crouched on the floor. At the sound of steps coming from the outside, she lowered her arms, and he saw red hair, a face with swollen lips, and a pair of unblinking eyes. Silent and white, Lucia emanated heat. Not pain and not anger, just heat. As he stood glaring at her naked arm where the sleeve was torn, the door at the bottom of the room flew open, and the baker appeared in it. He was the Corsican with wiry locks, eyes like prunes, and an athlete's frame. The fur on his chest was powdered with flour. Under

a bristling mustache, teeth glistened in a grimace that vacillated between a smile and a cramp. A rolling pin in his paw, without a word he advanced on the creature who, half-heaving herself, waited on all fours, equally speechless; an animal with a woman's face.

Baptiste went mad. The monks' liquor still bubbling in his veins, he flung himself at the baker. The unexpected attack swept the man off his feet. He rocked, fell against the wall, and slumped down. Baptiste would perhaps have killed him but for the woman who, before her defender could even raise a fist, had covered the baker with her body. Quick as lightning, cool, self-possessed, a tall, shapely figure with commanding eyes, from a crouching beast she was transfigured into a fury. "*Bandit! Assassin! Don't touch me! Get out of here!*" she shouted as Baptiste backed out of the room. Leaving the house he caught a last glimpse of her. "*Ettorino, cuor mio,*" she was lisping with childish tenderness, leaning over the prostrate Corsican. "Speak to Lucia! Were you hurt by the brute?"

This incident closed the romantic chapter in Baptiste's life. He let a younger brother make the trips to the Lérins Isles, stopped watching the sea and the clouds, set his face against the world, and soon afterwards married. But in his later years of labor on a soil as unresponsive as his wife's body, nothing had quite effaced the early image of an island where French royalty suffered through an English duke's perfidy, and red-haired Lucia called him an assassin for defending her against the brutishness of her husband.

As he appeared on the porch, Pierre was given a withering look by his father. But Paul, having caught sight of his sister Jacqueline sucking caramels behind the shed, had

already speeded up the reading. "—What does your Lordship think of the voyage of His Majesty's sister-in-law to England?"

"I have no doubt but that her brother, Charles II, will obey her evil injunctions." He blurted out the final bit of dialogue, slammed the book, and was gone.

Pierre sat down without being asked; from his pocket out came a bottle of Martin's White Horse. "It is not the olive grove yet, but I brought you a little present, Papa," he grinned. Baptiste cleared his throat and suffered the liquor to be poured into his glass. He disliked whisky, but to him the treat meant that Pierre was beginning to handle foreigners in the right way.

"Well," he said, "did you tell the woman the Abbey olives are no good? What does she want them for anyway, since she's going to live in Mexico?"

The feeling of being drawn into a new scheme strengthened Pierre's determination. "Papa," he said, "I know the Abbey olives are the best in the country. I know they are supposed never to be worm-eaten because the old abbot grew them from stones brought from the Holy Land. It's an old tale. Why pretend? You just want to buy them cheap. But I have worse worry than that: your jasmine field is beginning to give trouble." He drank the whisky he had poured himself at a gulp. "Mlle. Monroe's uncle is coming from England. She doesn't like the idea; no more do I."

Baptiste listened placidly. "That woman's uncle? And what is that to me? You know him?"

"Well, yes, I do. I mean, he was parachuted down here during the war. He's English. We called him Smith."

"Oh, the English troublemaker. Pity he did not break his neck."

Pierre chuckled. "He nearly did. I helped him to get well again."

Baptiste grimaced with distaste. "You are very intelligent when it comes to doing a stupid thing, *mon fils*. Marry the wrong girl . . . get rid of your good right arm . . . help the wrong man. . . ." He spat abundantly.

Pierre's features sharpened. "Was my giving you the money for the jasmine field helping the wrong man, Papa?"

Old Varioli stretched out his legs. "Oooo . . ." he yawned. "Are you sure *you* gave me the money? Was it not rather the corpse of some *épuré* in the glorious days of liberation? Do not fret! Money never stinks."

Pierre now looked like a half-strangled dog on a leash. "No, it does not!" he barked. "But your jasmine may yet stink to high heaven, if you do not return what I have taken to make it yours! The uncle of Mademoiselle's, David Monroe his name is, and Smith are the same man."

Baptiste rocked his chair as he reached lazily for the bottle. "Why should my jasmine stink if you are caught? I never gave you a receipt. Was there a witness?"

A silence as thin as a cobweb in which a word struggles like a helpless fly throbbed under the trellis. At last Pierre gasped: "Good God, I thought you were a Christian, Papa."

Baptiste poured himself some more liquor; he seemed to munch something of an odd flavor. "I am a Christian, certainly," he said. "This is why I insisted on Paul being baptized. I want no mud to stick to him. His mother—even in your *Maquis* they called her *La Clocharde*—is a disgrace enough for one family. I want Paul to be clean."

"Oh, *you* want it! *You* want Paul to be clean with his father locked up for stealing a public fund! Is that what you want?"

The old man's mouth distended in a smile. "A public fund? Bah! If you say it was a public fund what has Good God to do with the whole affair? Do you think your Englishman is one of his angels?"

"Angel or no angel, he left with me a sum of money for the *réseau*, and he may well wish to learn what has become of it."

"Ah, ça!" The old man spat again. "That one will never wish to learn nothing. You say his name is Monroe and his first name David, yes? Then I know him. There was a cub by that name at the Domaine. Once I nailed a bat on their cowshed door—I did it for neighborly kindness, to scare away the vampires that were milking their cows. Well, he, that cub, he saw it, and he jumped at me with his fists. I laughed, and he cried. They're all mad in that family. His sister caught a malady from a black soldier at the Front. The mother washed strawberries in eau de cologne. And the father—you wouldn't remember him; you were quite small then—he gave you ten francs for stealing cherries in his orchard."

Pierre blinked uncomfortably; then spread out the letter on the table, while Baptiste growled, "You read." But, as he listened, the message did not seem to impress him; "*Zut alors!*" he said petulantly after a moment. "What I want to know is why the American Monroe does not like the English Monroe. Is she afraid he will not let her sell the olive orchard?"

Pierre returned the letter to his pocket. "I suppose he cannot stop her from selling anything since apparently he is not a milord. Mademoiselle says he does not like them because he is an anarchist or something. Who knows? He

was raving a lot about social justice when he was sick in the *cabanon*."

Baptiste knitted his brows. "Wait. . . . He is poor, and she is rich, that is good enough reason for them to hate each other. But what has all this to do with us? As for the jasmine field, I'm not a beggarly potter like your wife's father. The field was bought by me."

He glared at his son's artificial arm. "That arm of yours . . . you lost it through foreign plotting, did you not? In 1943 France was not at war any longer. What need was there for you to gamble with what was not your property? The right arm of a farmer's son belongs to the farm. *Alors*, who should pay me for the loss of your arm, if not an English troublemaker or anarchist or whoever the devil is? God has nothing to do with the folly you call *résistance* and *épuration*! Nothing at all!"

From his pocket he dug out a half-spent Gauloise and threw it across the table at Pierre. "There! Have a smoke. In your answer to his letter, call the devil 'milord,' and say he is welcome to the village." He grinned. "I shall let him camp on my own grounds. I shall keep an eye on him, that will settle him. As for the American Monroes, no need to tell them anything."

He stood up, and, his knees bent with age, crept away from under the trellis into the blazing sun.

5

The village hall was the former *château* of the local marquise, but now official information was displayed on its shabby walls in the name of the Republic. Except for two bicycles in the gateway, waiting perhaps for clerks working overtime, it betrayed no sign of life, past or present, as the Monroes drove into the *Place de la République*. In front of a peach-colored house nearby a few men were standing under the word *Café*, painted in blue over the entrance door. Early evening coolness drifted under the plane trees from the hills, and the clatter of washing-paddles at the fountain was growing faint. Women, black against the declining sun, were crossing the square carrying on their heads flat baskets piled high with wet laundry.

David Monroe was looking for the petrol station when one of the idlers broke away from the group. His eyes riveted on the GB license plate, he came up to the car at a leisurely pace. Broad shoulders in a light coat; short neck, short legs; a *béret Basque* poised saucily on a mop of dark curls; a smile half-eager, half-reticent, his face would have been pleasant were it less changeable.

A few weeks earlier he had written in his native tongue a letter more or less as follows:

“Milord is most welcome to the village which owes so much to his late Father’s generosity, as well

as the kindness of his lady Mother and the heroic martyr, his late Sister.

"You may remember *La Clocharde*. She is my wife now, and we are blessed with three children.

"We were awed to learn whom we had had the honor to shelter in that miserable *cabanon*. We can only hope that Monsieur will forgive and forget the liberties we took. We were young fools then, and times were crazy.

"If camping really is your wish, my father, M. Jean Baptiste Varioli, is ready to let you camp any time on the piece of ground he owns at a kilometer's distance from his farm, at a spot overlooking the valley and the sea. It would not do for me to look for any other place since this is by far the best camping site in the country.

We remain your and your
family's devoted servants,

Pierre and Mauricette Varioli."

As the letter lay open on the desk one evening in London, David said to Agnes, "If liberties taken by young fools have to be forgiven and forgotten, the trip perhaps is not worth taking."

But a day or two later, sitting down to write again, he remarked, "Of course, we mustn't forget French formality is at its most Chinese in the peasant class. The chap didn't really mean anything he wrote except that a good camping site is available to us."

And so, as he saw Pierre stalking toward him across the square, he did not wait; he leapt out of the car, rushed

to meet him, gripped his hand, and shook it hard and long.

The man laughed happily. "It is a great pleasure to see you in good health, Monsieur. A great pleasure indeed. They are expecting you at the farm."

"Forget the 'Monsieur,' Pierre. Call me David. Or Smith, as before. How is Mauricette?"

"Mauricette is fine, thank you. She regrets she had to stay away. The Americans she is working for are having a dinner party tonight."

Agnes and Pat came forward. There followed more handshaking, more smiles. The station wagon was locked. Bowing and shoving, they filed into the café for a drink.

Mineral water was served at a marble-topped table for the girls, while the men hoisted themselves onto high stools at the bar.

"What happened to your arm, *mon vieux*?" David asked.

"The right one?" the Frenchman chuckled. "It is not my arm any longer. It is an American lady's present. Did you not hear I was in the Toulon tunnel raid? It was soon after you were safely delivered to that submarine off St. Raphael."

"No, I never knew. Good Lord! Tell me all about it. Two Pernods, please!"

While they sipped their drinks everybody in the room suddenly fell silent. Perhaps they were waiting for Pierre to embark on his story, or the foreigners to do something silly.

With his eyes cast down, his mouth stretching into a smile now grave, now cross, now vacant, Pierre shrugged his shoulders. "You know how it was in those times. Throw

the Hun out of the *chère patrie*. Especially since he was already on the run."

In a corner someone began bellowing as if in support of the gibe, or else to drown the forthcoming speech. A new guest walked in and the bellowing ceased. The two gulped down their Pernods.

"Anyway," Pierre continued in a low voice, "on that expedition I was in charge of the fuses. Well, the Toulon tunnel was blown up all right." He squinted modestly at his breast.

"Oh, what's that? A medal? Let's have some more of this stuff, then." David caught the barman's eye. "I am sorry about your arm though."

"Oh, you need not be. Because I am a cripple I found myself a better job than pitching manure on the farm."

"What sort of a job?"

"I am a butler at the same place where Mauricette does the cooking for the American pair."

"In that case I would rather camp near where you two work." David slapped Pierre's knee. But instead of slapping him back, the man tossed his head.

"I never said we lived where we worked."

"Oh! Don't you? Why?"

"My father loves Paul too much to let us live with strangers."

"Is Paul your boy?"

"Naturally! My father's only grandson."

Pierre put his glass down on the counter with a bang, and looked round haughtily, while David stared into the distance.

"Remember, Pierre, how your father used to hate

Mauricette? And the Resistance? Wasn't there a butcher's daughter with a fat dowry he wanted you to marry?"

Pierre frowned. "I am an only son, David. My father must think of the family's future. But Mauricette's father is a street potter, a beggar. That is why Mauricette took to the *Résistance*." Angry tears stood out in his eyes. "When it finally came to marriage, he could not afford so much as a proper wedding for his only daughter! We were married in a side chapel, with no organ, no nuptial mass, no *Te Deum*—" He gave David's glass a push while straightening himself. "Mauricette wanted me to borrow money to make it a decent ceremony, but naturally I refused!" He darted a quick glance at the barman. "Everybody here will tell you the Variolis do not like borrowing. Eh, Franchot! Monsieur here is English. Tell him: have I ever failed to pay you for my drinks?"

The barman blinked in exaggerated surprise, raising a pair of innocent eyes to the ceiling, twirling a cocktail stick. "Who said you failed to pay me? I am sure Monsieur did not come here to find out about your drinking debts."

From a considerable height he dropped on David a smile of sticky sweetness. David groaned in embarrassment: "Oh, no, indeed. If ever there was anyone in debt, I am the man. Why, Pierre and Mauricette saved my life."

The barman blew at some invisible speck in the air. But Pierre stirred violently on his precarious seat. "I knew," he said, "I knew you were a good comrade, David! With no dirty thoughts at the back of your mind. But talking of Mauricette"—he shaped his mouth into a horseshoe—"I must admit she never insisted on my borrowing money." He smirked on the wrong side of the horseshoe.

The sticky feeling was becoming irksome.

"Oh, but Pierre . . ." David waved his hand in deprecation. "Luckily, I have not come this time because of any money."

Pierre opened his mouth, shut it again, exclaimed: "I am sure you did not! Why should you?" The cloud returned. "Ah!" he sighed. "On our wedding day we were not yet liberated." He brightened up. "Mauricette put on a white blouse with that blue-and-red-striped skirt you liked. Remember? You called the dress her *tricolore*. I was wearing an old gray flannel costume. The advocate I was working for then as a messenger, a good *Maquisard*, gave it to me. That is how we were married, David! A poor couple in a poor France ruined by a capitalist war and the collaborationists. Ha, ha!" he banged his fist on the counter. "Then the *libération* came, and for *les grands messieurs* all went as smoothly as before, and for us poor devils as badly as before, only worse! Yes, worse. Because we were cheated out of our hopes."

He leaned back on the wobbly seat and stared around him, looking grand. And the men who at first had scoffed at his words now seemed to admire him; they nodded, and grumbled, and banged their fists on the tables.

"Pat," Agnes said, "Why do you pretend you don't hear me? For the umpteenth time: do you want to go to the toilet or not?"

Pat started. "Oh, toilet . . . I didn't hear you, Mum. Honestly, I didn't. I was listening to Dad and the Frenchman talking."

"I see! Forgive me. And what, pray, did they say in French, Mam'selle?"

Pat made herself sound like her father when he ex-

plained things to her. "They talked as men do; family, politics. The Frenchman is unhappy about his liberation. Dad doesn't mind though. That's all."

Agnes gasped. "Gracious! You certainly did profit by your French lessons, darling. But what d'you make of such English words as politics or liberation? D'you mean you know what liberation is?"

Now that Pat was reminded of the toilet she fidgeted. "Of course I know! I know I want to be liberated from the garlic I ate at lunch. Let's go, Mum! Where's that bathroom?"

As they moved toward the door Pierre downed his third Pernod and looked sheepishly at David. "*Les Anglais*—what a race! I shall die and still I shall not know what they are made of. Why, David, even when you were delirious you never indicated that you were a Monroe."

David reached for his wallet. "I never thought much of my family."

"Strange . . . strange," Pierre examined his beret before putting it back on his head. "Now tell me . . . how was it you discovered my real name and address? I was Pépé in the *Résistance*, and Mauricette was *La Clocharde*."

David smiled. "Remember the sailor from the English sub dressed like a fisherman? He was waiting for us in that *bistro* near the quay at St. Raphael. Well, years later he went honeymooning at Cannes. One day on the Croizette you, Pierre, were having words with a *flic* about parking your motorbike where you should not. He heard you give your name and address to the *flic*. He told me."

"Strange. He remembered my face after so many years!" Pierre whistled pensively while David paid the bill.

They were both seated in the car, David at the wheel,

Pierre next to him, when Agnes and Pat returned from their excursion.

"How far from here to the farm?" David asked.

"A kilometer's distance." Turning around to Agnes, Pierre flashed a quick smile at her. "Madame must be tired."

She smiled back, saying *merci*, one of her good French words. Swarms of what seemed invisible pins in the air chirruped in waves of rusty sound. Pat leaned over the Frenchman's shoulder. "What is the noise, *s'il vous plait*? Are they fireflies?"

"Mademoiselle speaks French? So young? Oh, no, they are not fireflies! Fireflies do not make noises, they just shine. What you now hear, they are cicadas." He whispered to David: "Mademoiselle seems to know a lot about France."

"Her name is Pat," David corrected him. "She is a funny child."

Pat felt encouraged to show more of her knowledge:

". . . *Courrez, courez bien,*
Cher petit lutin. . ."

she recited, rolling her *rr*'s very carefully.

There was silence. Agnes was dozing off; Pat fell back on her seat. She knew her father disapproved of her referring to *cher petit lutin*. Since he did not like Cynthia and Martin, he must disapprove of this kind of France. Being his friend, Pierre, too, was bound to disapprove of it. But if so, why had her father taught her the little poem at all? Not only had he bidden her learn it by heart, but he had bought her a rag doll with enormous black eyes embroidered on a pale face. "This doll is like Mlle. Gabrielle,

my French governess," he had told her. "She taught me French nursery rhymes."

"Do you remember, Pierre," David said chuckling, "how we used to huddle together on a chilly night, all three of us, on the straw mattress in that *cabanon*, watching the stars? Mauricette. . . ."

Pierre started. "Aha! You knew even then her name was Mauricette."

"You could not call her *La Clocharde* while making love to her, could you? Well, Mauricette had picked for herself two stars, Mars and Venus. I was ordered to shut my eyes tight. And you two . . ." the voice faded and emerged thinner from a momentary silence. "After some time Mauricette would cry, one, two, three! And you and I had to say quickly the name of the star we saw first. The one who found Venus won a kiss, the one who found Mars got slapped in the face. I don't think I cheated much. Did you?"

"Ah," Pierre sighed. "I suppose no matter what class and nationality, people are silly when they are young. I hope I have not offended you with my remark at the café. Naturally, you could not reveal your name to us. But you must not think, David, that I brought Mauricette to the *cabanon* because I wanted to make love to her. *Non!* I had honorable intentions toward her from the first. It was for your safety's sake. You know the old olive orchard was the haunt of children minding goats. If they had seen me sneaking into the *cabanon* without a female, they would have thought there was something fishy at once."

The road led through a pinewood interspersed with clearings, and the touch of the air on Pat's cheek was now warm and soapy, now sharp. Kiss and slap! Yes, she knew

all that. She knew about her parents' big bed. She tugged at Agnes' sweater. "Mum! Why is love not honorable intentions?"

"What was that? What's that?" Agnes whispered, wrenching herself from sleep. Her eyes opened up quite near to Pat's face, rather frightening. "What *are* you talking about?" The eyes became even larger, only to disappear under their lids as the mouth yawned. "Look here, Patsy! Don't you worry your head about big words! What you said about liberation was disgusting enough."

Pat remembered that big people did not like answering questions, even if they knew what to say. "All right! You mustn't tell me. I know it anyway," she said.

Agnes craned her neck as if to look into Pat's throat for germs, but the car stalled and they were thrown forward. A tinkling, bleating mass of grayness was descending from a hill on the road, followed by a dog and a shepherd.

Pat leaped to her feet. "*Moutons, moutons!*" she cried. "*Revenons à nos moutons.* Let's go back to our mutton. Daddy, don't you always say that when you make it up with Mum? What does it mean, Monsieur?"

"I do not know what your papa meant, Mademoiselle," the Frenchman stifled a titter. "Some people say, '*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.*' But Mademoiselle is too young to understand that, I suppose."

"To understand what?" she pouted. "I know *amour* means love; I understand it very well."

Pierre coughed, and David fussed, the tinkling cloud rolled across the road, and Pierre leaned out of the car. "Those are my father's sheep coming down from the pastures." He sighed. "There has been an outbreak of epidemics up there in the mountains."

The bleating grayness faded down the slope on the other side of the road, and the car entered a sort of tunnel between rocks leading to a hollow. There, a square house and two sheds, all looking like rocks, stuck out of bare ground. The sun still glowed at the far end of the world, setting hills on fire, and it was dark on the road and bluish gray in the hollow. Passing no neighbors, no fences, no gate, only lavender, David parked beside a plot of artichokes.

6

"*Maman, Maman!* They've come. Where's Papa?" Pierre called as he jumped out of the car.

A woman in a black full-skirted dress and a straw hat with a black *ruche* draped around its crown, started where she scrubbed a frying pan near a well. Her eyes seemed unable to take in sights not of her own choice. "Ah, it's you, Pierrot," she said. "Your father is still at his jasmine field." She dropped the frying pan; suddenly looking miserable, she raised her arms. "Ah, she was so beautiful, so clever. . . . Dear Margot! she loved me. Why should the brutes have killed her?"

Pierre hissed in irritation. "Stop rambling, *Maman!* Can't you see the Englishman and his family are here?"

She never turned her head. "But why should the boys have killed Margot?"

Pat let her mother's hand go. "Who is Margot?" she addressed herself in French to no one in particular.

The woman's face was blurred by the dusk; she sounded surprised as she asked in return, "Didn't you tell them, Pierrot?" Then she lost patience: "Of course, she was a thief! Every magpie is. Still I wish everyone were as beautiful and loving as she was."

Wheels creaked, a donkey brayed. A stocky, bearded man appeared from behind a fig tree, carrying a spade and a hoe.

"Papa, it's Milord and his family," Pierre busily intervened.

His knees bent like an Alpine climber's, taking long strides, the old man walked up to them. His mouth and eyes were hidden in tufts of hair; there was no feeling in his face, just strength. After carefully depositing the tools on a barrow near the shed's entrance, he wiped his right hand on his trousers and offered it to David with enormous pride, like alms. "I hope you had a good journey." And to his son: "It is not night yet. It would be better to show the site to Monsieur right away, so that there is no time lost. The Grand Hotel doesn't close till late."

David balked. "From what I heard, Mr. Varioli, I am sure we shall like your site. There will be plenty of time tomorrow. I regret we came rather late, but it is because we were so anxious to see old friends. And also hoping to make new ones."

The beard jerked. "*Ah, bon, bon, bon!*" He raised his voice. "Titine! Bring a bottle of my last year's *marc* and four glasses to the bower, will you?"

Cicadas chirruped frantically while sheep were stream-

ing without a sound into the fold in the back yard where a tall cypress brooded in solitary confinement.

Pulling at his beret Pierre led the way to a wisteria bower near the front door of the house. There they sat down on iron chairs, and soon Madame Varioli put a tray on a rickety table before them with a great clatter of glasses. "Here is your *marc*, Baptiste," she said, and withdrew.

Old Varioli poured. "To your good health, the company!" They drank. Once more he filled the glasses. "To the *belle dame!*" He pointed to Agnes.

The moon had risen; light was oozing through the leaves as they drank, screwing up their faces into smiles, and Pat saw the old man's eyes. In one sharp glance he sized her mother up and down to the waist, then fell back into the gloom. It was like a stroke of lightning, and it went through Pat's heart. Unnoticed, she crept away from the bower.

The shepherd was not to be seen, but a dog, its tail wagging benevolently, stood on a little mound watching the flock as they milled around trying to find the entrance to the pen. She dashed up the hillock from behind the dog, and before it sensed her, she had her hand deep in the curls on its neck. A thrill ran through the shaggy body. Ducking its head, baring its teeth, it did not yet move. "Good old doggie, nice dirty old doggie," she stroked its back; then the farmer called "*César, ici!*" in a thick, passionate voice.

The dog stiffened. Nearly knocking her down, it tore away and came to wriggle at its master's feet. The man kicked it in the ribs, then on the head. The animal squealed, the thick voice said, "This dog must not be touched. It is not a poodle, it is a farmer's dog!"

Mustn't be touched, and he kicks it? Pat rushed back to the bower. "You wicked old man!" she blurted, squatting near César. "What are you kicking that dog for? He is filthy, but he is sweet. Mummy! let's take César to the hotel and give him a good wash. Shall we?"

David got up. "Pardon me, Mr. Varioli. The child is mad about animals." He eyed Pat sternly. "You shouldn't talk like this to Mr. Varioli. Say you're sorry, Patricia."

She shook her head. "*Non, non!* I'm not!" she darted for the car.

In an upper-story window, faces popped out from behind a curtain while a swallow shot from under the roof. Mumbling excuses and good-byes, Agnes and David took leave of the farmer.

"You do not wish to look at the site now?" Pierre joined in the retreat.

"No, not now, Pierre." David at the end of the long day sounded forcibly cheerful. "The child is tired. That is why she is naughty. Will you not drive up to the hotel for another little glass of something?"

"No, thank you." The door was slammed on them, and Pierre leaned inside the car through the window, "I hope you understand, David. I hope there is no offense. Had I known the English milord was your father, I would never have spoken of him as I did at the *cabanon*. But how was I to know? I am not the Holy Ghost." Resentment soured the words.

"But, of course, I understand!" David suppressed a yawn. "What does it matter who was whose father? We were fighting a war so that we could choose our future for ourselves. What had your or my father to do with that?"

Pierre withdrew his head. "Ah, it is not as simple as

all that," he muttered. "You may want to choose your future, but you cannot choose your past. And once you have a father, you do not hide him in a cupboard. Not even if he is a corpse, *non*. Because of the stench. *Eh, oui*. If it is not his temper or the cross on his tomb or the inheritance . . . there is still the bad odor to remind you of your father."

He touched his beret. "*Bonne nuit, Madame! Bonne nuit, Mademoiselle!* Shall I see you at the hotel tomorrow morning, David?" His foot on the brake, David was patience itself. "Certainly, Pierre! We want to look at that site early in the morning; after breakfast, that is. Don't we, Agnes?"

"Yes, darling." She produced some more of her best French: "*Bonne nuit, Monsieur.*"

They drove off into the night. For some time there was nothing but dogs dutifully barking somewhere far away, and wholesome dry smells drifting into the car from the trees and the grass asleep on the hills under the moon. Then Agnes said, "I didn't quite catch what you and Pierre were saying. What was that about fathers? Did you know old Varioli before?"

He yawned. "I don't know. I don't think so." The tone discouraged conversation.

She did not insist, just lit a cigarette for him and relaxed.

Did I ever know him? David picked up the question for himself and threw it back into that depth where wrecks and corpses and unforgettable beauty swim in shoals. There was no need for him to identify the old stick, morose and gaunt, with that other Baptiste of thirty years ago, a young farmer with a noisy laugh. No need, and no sense.

The moon was riding high now in the greenish air, and

its light fell heavily on the trees; they stood still, terror-stricken, different from their daytime selves, more like deep-sea monsters pretending to be dead because an octopus was near. But then a slight, an almost imperceptible breeze came whispering through palm leaves, and somebody laughed behind the wall of a garden, and the full moon opened up like a Druschki rose, delicately scented, prosperous, wedding white.

It certainly stirred memories. . . . Oh, the boundless relief of a child awake in the midst of a Mediterranean night, to hear people laugh under the moon! Oh, the boundless wonder, boundless anger when the reason for the laughter was discovered!

It had been on a night like this that David had met the other Baptiste.

He had wakened in his room, only to see the dead water of the moon splashed all over the floor. A great weight lay on him, and he knew that it, too, was the moon. Close to his ear he heard again his mother's rasping words: "David should never have been born, never!" He had shut his eyes against the night, and a dazzling thought had shot through him: if I stop breathing now, tomorrow there will be no moon and no mother; it will be as if I were never born.

He had pressed his lips tightly together, steeled his stomach, cut his respiration. But then a man's laughter soared from somewhere between the big well and the cowshed in the farmyard; swelling, rocketing, spilling a warm glow in the dark, it was soon joined by the giggling of the kitchenmaids.

David recognized the boisterous young farmer Baptiste. Smiling broadly, the moon dropped her death mask. Dogs

barked excitedly, not as a warning, only for joy and companionship. Hammer! Hammer! Someone was hammering away.

David leaped out of his bed, and just as he stood, in his pajamas, he hurled himself down the stairs to the back door, and out into that barking, laughing, and hammering, deep in the waters of the moon.

"What are you hammering at, Baptiste?" he had shouted. But as he halted at the cowshed, there was no need to ask; he could see for himself that Baptiste was crucifying a large bat. With one wing nailed down to the shed door, the other quivering under the strokes, it squealed like a newborn kitten, and bled.

"What are you doing that for?" David had gasped.

"Don't you know?" someone cheerfully exclaimed while Baptiste banged on. "It's for scaring other vampires away so they won't milk your father's cows."

David had felt flaring up in his heart devoted love for the vampire, and then desperate anger with Baptiste. Horror had kept him paralyzed for a moment; a new kind of horror, not of the silent moon, but of people laughing at a live, bleeding thing. He had thrown himself forward and had pummeled Baptiste's back with his fists.

The man had shaken him off, and Annonciate the cook had clapped her hands: "Shoo, shoo, David!" she cried, driving him off. "You crazy? Why aren't you in bed anyway?"

Shrill voices, mouths breezing garlic and alcohol, the bat wriggling madly on its nails, had formed a monster that chased and licked David as he ran blindly into the night until he knocked into a tree. More cries then filled the darkness with even more horror. "It's a fig tree, a fig

tree, David! Don't touch it! With the full moon on you, it'll make you impotent."

Mlle. Gabrielle had emerged from a pool of shadow, the post office clerk holding her by the waist. "He's English," he said. "Why should he want to be a man?"

"What are you thinking of, David?" Agnes asked softly.

"Oh!" he started. "You caught me remembering things. A moonlit night like this when I was a small boy. And how a bat was crucified by a farmer on the Monroe cowshed."

"A bat? Crucified?" Pat stirred in the back seat where she had kept quiet after disgracing the family by her rudeness to Mr. Varioli. "Why should a bat be crucified? He's not Jesus Christ."

"No, not Jesus Christ," David admitted. "Still it was pretty awful. The man, of course, said the bat was milking my father's cows; one of those old wives' tales."

Pat's rebellious mood instantly returned. "Why do you say it was awful, Dad?" she cried. "That bat was not like Jesus Christ at all. It was more like a spiv. Not working, not minding other people, just having it all easy for him, and free. . . . It was like Cynthia and Martin." No sooner had she uttered the names than she burst into tears. "Oh, Dad, oh!" she sobbed. "Do you really think Cynthia and Martin are very bad spivs? Please, please, don't let them be crucified! Please!"

David turned off the road and stopped. "God, that child's tired. . . !"

They both crowded into the back, Agnes gathering Pat on her lap, David trying to arrange her legs on a cushion.

"You go to sleep, dear," they said. "Don't wait for the hotel. Want a mint candy?"

David returned to the wheel and restarted the engine. The car swung like a hammock over holes in the road, stars leaped up and fell tinkling on a field. "Hear that, Mr. Dobson?" Pat mumbled, half asleep. "It's Judas' silver coins. . . ."

The cocky little voice fell silent, as if there were no more words it could use, or no sense in using them.

Agnes said, "She broke off in the middle of a sentence, and went to sleep. What do you think of her not being afraid of a beast like that farmer's dog? And how she dressed down old Varioli—"

"Why not? She thinks she's the Fairy Queen, reckless."

"D'you know what she told me one day at home? 'I know, Mummy, murderers "mangle" people. But I'm keeping my own little murderer in a cage, and he's safe; he sings.' 'How did you manage to put him in a cage?' I said. 'Oh, he asked me to. He knows I love Peep and Popp, and so he doesn't want to mangle them. Because he loves me. But when he's in the streets it's, of course, his job to mangle people.' How d'you like that?"

"A prisoner of love . . . not bad. Who are Peep and Popp? Are they the two old actresses across the road?"

"The Misses Flopp, yes."

The car ceased to swing and the stars to tinkle. Pat sighed with relief. There was a commotion. Arms pulled and pushed. Pat was picked up.

"This way, David," Agnes said. "Mind her head, I'm holding the door."

A door banged, quick French words were scattered all over a staircase, and Pat was lowered to a bed.

7

Like a tremendous lamp, France was filled with blazing gold when three days later Pat crept right into it out of the station wagon. Quite a while passed before she could put a name to the sight so unlike the few purplish sunrises she had seen at home. Although the air was gentle, it was also foreign, and she shivered.

In her blue pajamas she stood on the broad ledge up the hillside where yesterday the car had been finally parked for camping, and she blinked; and she sniffed at the teasing smell of the pinewoods above her and the bluish haze that drifted up from the valley bringing more smells. On her left she could see in the distance a big dish full of something that looked even more like lavender water than the perfume in her mother's bottle. But it glimmered. Could it be the Mediterranean? On the further side of the valley a cone-shaped hill was carrying on its narrow head a tray crammed with pink, orange, and yellow cubes, topped with a tower. Could that be a village? Nobody was in sight anywhere, yet she felt uneasy buttoning up her jacket, as if some rude man, perhaps a doctor, was staring at her.

What's this? What's that? She prodded the dry little flowers with her toe. They might be pretty; they were not rockery plants as she knew them. A grasshopper jerked from under a pebble with a shrill cry, giving her a start. She could not focus on any one thing; her eyes glided,

flew, leaped, making her heart beat fast. It was Dad's France, and she did not trust it.

He slept in the tent beyond the huge evergreen and her mother slept inside the car. Pat wanted to go to the bathroom, but here it was not a simple thing to do. The night before, her mother had shown her the hole her father and Pierre had dug in the midst of prickly shrubs, having first cleared the ground round it and built up a heap of earth to shovel, instead of flushing water. She could still feel the chill of the foreign night on her bottom. It was getting warmer and warmer though, and she was getting more and more uncomfortable. So, walking gingerly on her toes along the narrow path, she addressed herself to what was supposed to be the faraway lavatory paved with moss instead of tile. There she crouched, clasping a toilet roll in her hand, wondering at the fancy ways of people abroad. Then she saw a face. At some ten paces' distance it grew out of a rosemary bush right in front of her. Round, sun-tanned, with big brown eyes and curly hair, it did not blink or wink or speak, it just gazed. She sprang up and would have run away but for its stillness. There are goblins in Dad's France too, and they have faces, she thought. It wouldn't do to offend a goblin, even in Dad's France; she pulled up her pants. Diving into the bracken off the path, she made sure there were no faces there.

Agnes was brushing her hair outside the car when Pat came back. It always gave Pat a turn to see that shiny copper hair loose, down her mother's shoulders. When it was not done it seemed unleashed, up to tricks, awkward. "Hi, Mum!" she called, and clapped her hands as if to shoo something away.

"Hi, darling," Agnes said. "I saw you making straight for the bathroom. Good girl! Isn't it all fun?"

"Did you enjoy sleeping out, Mum?"

Without waiting for an answer, kicking at last year's leaves which rustled, Pat headed for the tent. The fly was open, and David Monroe lay on his back, arms under his neck, eyes fastened not on his France outside, but on something over his head. Quiet as a mouse, she peeped in trying to discover the thing; there was nothing, just canvas.

"Hullo, Dad," she ventured. "I have just seen a goblin in your France."

He started. "Oh, it's you, Patton. . . ." The French twist to her name was in memory of "*Madelon, Madelon. . .*" Mlle. Gabrielle's favorite song. He sat up on his rubber mattress. "Listen, Pat," he said. "There are no fairies in France. None at all. Unless you mean angels. But those are stone or painting. They don't bother people. Understand?"

She blinked. "Have French bushes faces then?"

"No. French bushes have *no* faces. To teach you a few sensible things about France. . . . Now, this is great news and you'd better stop skipping! Well, Patton, you have been admitted to the village school here, for the while. They did it as a favor to me because I tried to help them during the war. So please, Pat, behave yourself; try not to talk nonsense to French children when you meet them, there's a good girl!"

This sounded interesting enough, and Pat skipped back to her mother with the news. But as soon as she saw her she forgot to tell: Agnes was now wearing what looked like an Ascot hat, with a pair of shorts and a bra. "Won't you dress, Mum?" Pat suggested.

"I am dressed, Pat. This is a warm country. As soon

as the sun goes up a bit more, I'll change you into shorts too."

"Won't people mind us?"

"What people?" Agnes swept the country with her large blue eyes. "There's not a living soul within a mile's distance."

"Oh, yes, there is." Pat was fastening her sandals. "Can't you feel someone's watching us?"

Agnes shrugged her shoulders. "Come along, dear, you help me cook breakfast."

Cooking breakfast on an alcohol stove in the open, and laying the table on a flat rock with big round leaves serving as mats, *was* fun; Pat whistled like a blackbird.

Soon David appeared wearing shorts. His undershirt was cut low, his arms were whiter than Agnes', but there was black hair on his chest, as well as on his legs.

"Won't you be cold, Dad?" Pat murmured.

He shook his head, and turned to his wife. "Hullo, Agnes. Sleep well?"

Knees wide apart, the left arm with a gold wrist watch hanging carelessly in his hand between his legs, he sat down on a tree stump. Agnes threw a cushion at him, another at Pat, keeping one for herself.

Pat bit into her bread, but could not swallow; all her hunger went into absorbing her new mother and father, their naked skins shiny in the sun. It looked as though David's body were still asleep, or too proud to make friends. But when Agnes' mouth smiled, the flesh between her bra and shorts also smiled. David's shoulders seemed even broader than were his coat's; it was a mystery to Pat how he had managed not to burst the sleeves. His bony knees, like two tiny bald heads, looked worried, and his

neck self-conscious about being so big and stiff. Agnes' bra on the other hand trembled softly just where on his front there was nothing but hair, like moss over a stone plate. Except perhaps in his head, nothing seemed to be going on inside him, while warm milk seemed to bubble inside her mother. No wonder they fight in Mum's bed; they are so different, Pat reflected.

"Aren't you hot, Pat?" Agnes said. "Drop your jacket, it'll be all right."

She dropped it, and eased her pants a little, so as to be able to squint at her own breasts and tummy, to compare. Well, no; she was not in the least like either of the two; she smiled contentedly and swallowed her piece of bread.

"Mum, d'you know I was entered in a French school?" she said.

Agnes opened her mouth to reply, but then the usual thing happened; Pat ceased to hear words, she saw shapes turn into something else. As they spoke, her mother's and father's vast bodies were getting suppler and suppler, till nothing was left but voices and eyes that shone. Soon the eyes, too, melted into the gold and blue around, and there was only herself trying to remain Pat Monroe forever.

Not until the cushion was pulled from under her, did Pat awaken to Agnes' scolding "All right! So you stay where you are; Dad will help me wash up. But don't you blame me if we are late for the beach, Pat."

She got up and followed Agnes to the hydrant. "Was that how you used to have your breakfast when you were young and poor, Mum?" She handed her a bright red plastic cup.

"You mean when I was small and lived in the porter's lodge at Trusfield Hall?"

"And my granddad was my other granddad's porter, yes. And my Grannie Scottie was my other grannie's house-keeper."

"Well, no. At the lodge we had our breakfast on the kitchen table."

"Had my other grannie her breakfast on the kitchen table?"

"I don't think so. I never had breakfast with the Countess."

"Why not? Didn't you like her, Mummy?"

"I did. It's only that she was mostly living at the Domaine in France with your poor Aunt Mary."

"Why was my aunt poor, Mum, if her mum was a countess?"

"Oh, stop it, Pat! She wasn't poor because she was poor; she was poor because she lost her looks."

"Do you mean, Mum, my Aunt Mary had turned in-vi-sable?"

"She didn't turn invisible, darling, no. She probably wished she had. The scars on her face were only too visible indeed."

"So what? Jesus had plenty of scars when he came out of his coffin and people like him."

"Oh, Pat! Your Aunt Mary was not a saint. She was a beautiful young lady who lost her looks through love."

"Oh, but that's exactly what Mr. Dobson says Jesus did, Mummy! And he turned in-vi-sable for three days, Mr. Dobson says. And still he was not horrible; because he wasn't dead."

"Pat, you've got it all wrong. Jesus Christ was crucified—"

"I know, I know! Like the bat—"

"Don't interrupt me! Your Aunt Mary was *not* crucified. She just had an unlucky operation."

"But you said it was through love. Whom did she love? Her doctor? Mr. Dobson says Jesus loved thieves."

"For mercy's sake, child, stop blabbering! She loved her fiancé, a handsome English officer in the First World War. His name was Ashley and he went to the Front in France. So your aunt joined the nurses' corps and went to France too. But while she was working in a field hospital there, she caught a skin disease from which she never recovered. And Ashley never married her. See? Now you have the whole story. Satisfied?"

"Oh!" Pat gasped. "Oh, why didn't she kill Ashley? He was wickeder than the thieves."

Letting her arms drop, Agnes contemplated her daughter wearily as if she were the blazing bush. "Now I've had enough of this," she said. "The more I talk to you, the more you want to know."

"Pa-at!" David called from under the tent. "You know I'm taking you to school tomorrow. It is too late for the beach now. I want you to learn some more of *La Cigale et la Fourmi*, while Mum and I do some work."

Dragging her feet, Pat went under the tent and opened the book in which animals spoke verse without learning it.

". . . *La Cigale ayant chanté*
Tout l'été. . ."

She stopped her ears with her fingers, and lo! *La Cigale* was speaking in her head instead of in the fields. She re-

moved her fingers to see if *La Cigale* would depart. . . . It did.

Meanwhile, Agnes and David had taken a heavy box out of the car and had begun to sort out tools under the oak tree where they planned to set up the "living room." Soon they had a log balanced over a felled trunk and were sawing away, with sawdust trickling down, a thin dry rivulet. Just where they rocked to and fro there was nothing behind them but blue sky, and with that live saw glimmering and whizzing between them, to Pat, as she watched them from below, they looked like two giants playing some weird game on the world's edge. There was no point in her wanting to join them. Like that other game of kiss and slap, work was big people's own business.

She crept out of the tent and sat down on a nice warm stone. All around her sparse grass and juniper grew tall against the blue; they too swayed to and fro, but theirs seemed a pleasant game, neither clever nor stupid, dependent on the breeze, with no apparent rules to obey. At Pat's feet something rustled, and a lizard the color of stone raised its self-confident head; after a while it craned its neck and with one beady eye considered her toe. The lizard was dumb, small, no use to anybody; certainly not Dad's France, and Pat quickened to it. But a piece of wood fell under the saw, and the lizard vanished. "Clumsy fools," Pat muttered under her breath.

Agnes straightened her back. Except after a hot bath on a wintry day, Pat never saw her looking like this. Her hair streaming, her forehead sprinkled with sweat, she stooped for her hat on the grass and her bare spine shone wetly.

"Don't look at me, David," she said. "I look a fright. I must go and give myself a good do."

But he caught her by the arm, pressing her to himself, sniffing at her. "You stay where you are," he mumbled.

She tried to free herself. "I know it's proletarian charms you're after, aren't you?"

He bent her back and greedily kissed her mouth. She reeled, but did not fall. Their arms and legs entangled, they formed one big animal with two heads. As they stopped kissing and were two people again, she murmured, "Let's try for a boy, David. . . ." They threw their arms around each other's necks and went away into the bush, staggering on their feet, laughing stupidly.

They'll be fighting now. The thought sickened Pat. With no bed and no night to make it more decent for them. A boy? Before she was born, they were in love, Pat's mother had once said. But a boy, that was different. To have a boy, people of course must fight. I want a brother, Pat sighed.

Once more she stopped her ears and eyes with her fingers. The next thing she heard were the words of *La Fourmi*:

". . . *Que faisiez vous au temps chaud?*
Vous chantiez? j'en suis bien aise. . . ."

She threw the book into the grass and began to sing and dance, trying to be as much of a *cigale* as possible.

8

Because Pat had had measles and the whooping cough, and was therefore not a health liability, and because she knew *La Cigale et la Fourmi* by heart and was thus proficient in French, she was allowed to squeeze into a black knife-hacked desk in the *petite classe* at the village school. She sat there studying the French things around her: the round curly heads as the boys' legs kicked, and hands passed secret notes under the benches. What the master was saying, whipping one child after the other to its feet for interrogation, or what the busy scurrying of their answers meant did not concern her. Out of the window next to her desk she watched two monsters supposed to be trees as they nodded and bowed to the clouds over the playground; one with a bouquet of rusty fans on top of a pineapple trunk, and the other that would have been a chestnut, but for the meager greenish flowers on its branches, and the wrong name of *kaki*. She liked the sound of the paddles beating the stone *lavoir* beyond the *Place* where women in black were forever engaged in argument.

All sorts of smells drifted into the *petite classe* through the funny window, which opened by pushing it back on its hinges instead of sliding it up and down; smells of the nearby church, the baker's, the café, the fields, and the mountains; all of them strong, all trying to tell a bitter or sweet story. Pat played at guessing which was what, but the

school and the village having nothing to do with *les lucioles* and the English-speaking toads, she never worried about guessing right.

As they raced in the recreation ground during break, the children mobbed her, tugging at her tartan skirt and tightly plaited pigtails, making faces at her, yelling "*sale petite Anglaise*." She was not particularly disturbed; children in the London school (to which her mother had not wanted to send her, but her father had) had also mobbed her for some reason, shouting, "Miss Grandy, where's your dandy?" and that was even worse.

But one day a boy stuck out a pointed red tongue at her and she stuck out hers. At that he swallowed his and said, "*Morveuse, va*." So she swallowed hers and said, "*Morveux, va*." He was flabbergasted. "Do you speak French then?"

"Of course I do!"

He puffed out his cheeks. "What is your name?"

"Pat," she answered, and he scoffed, "Pat! What does that mean? It does not mean anything to me."

"It means Patricia Monroe, that is all. What is your name?" She was not really interested, but asked out of politeness.

"You guess!"

He was a little taller than she. As he waited for her to answer his round face and velvety eyes bloomed quietly above her. It reminded her of something she had recently seen.

She knew he was a real boy, but since he wanted to have a game with her, she said casually, "Your name? . . . Well. . . . Your name is *Un Lutin*."

"You are stupid!" he said to that. "I am Paul, and my

father is a great *Maquisard*. He is a hero; he has an iron arm." He sized her up critically. "It is the fault of the English; that is why my papa knows your papa."

She ignored the information and promptly asked, "Can you show me *les lucioles*, please? Cynthia said they were as big as headlamps."

"Cynthia is mad." He spat out a cherry stone. "Do you not know she is American? To an American a *luciole* and a headlamp are the same thing."

Pat's heart missed a beat. "Do you know Cynthia?" she breathed.

He shot a contemptuous glance at her as if she, too, were mad. "Naturally, I know Mademoiselle; my father and mother work for her. But there are no *lucioles* now. They don't show up till St. John's Day."

"Do you know Martin, too?" Her voice nearly failed her.

"*Oui*; he is painting me!"

The bell rang for the end of recess and the beginning of handicraft hour, which meant separate classes for boys and girls. "Oh, no, Mlle. Monroe!" the mistress called. "You do not want to do carpentry with the boys. This way, please."

With a piece of linen thrust into her hand, Pat sat down and tried to do the right thing with the needle. She did not dare look up, she was so mortified by her huge mistake. Though she had not bothered with the children before, now that she had discovered one of them knew Cynthia and Martin, she would like them to approve of her. Obviously, Cynthia and Martin were somewhere near. Where? Could Dad's France be their France too?

She glanced stealthily through the window at the tree

with the pineapple trunk to see if it were still the same monster. One of its fans curled up and seemed to beckon her. It made her so proud; she could not help laughing happily in response. But then the ribbon butterflies on the girls' heads fluttered, turning on her: "What on earth is the English *petite sotte* giggling for?"

In the afternoon Agnes called for Pat. Hand in hand they walked the stony streets, broken in endless steps, up to the terrace in front of the *auberge* where David sat, sipping coffee, watching the Esterels glow, reading *L'Humanité*.

"Hullo, Pat," he said. "Anything interesting at school today?"

She nodded. "A boy stuck out his tongue at me, and I stuck out mine. He was Paul."

"Oh?" he smiled. "Sounds an amusing little fellow. But were you listening to the *e muet*? It is particularly noticeable in Provence, you know."

"Oh, yes," she said. "It was particularly noticeable today."

"Can you give me an example?"

"They called me *la petite sotte*."

He chortled, bought her an *éclair*, and soon they were all three of them on their way back to their French home: the station wagon, the tent, the naked world with no windows or doors, no sink, and no cord to pull.

As they climbed up and down the steps leading from one squalid little square with a fountain into another, tall narrow houses merged into a solid wall of dirty pink and orange clay, festooned with men's pants and ladies' vests. From the rancid smell and the torn underwear, Pat gathered these were poor people's houses. Yet hadn't Paul said Cyn-

this was mad? For all Pat knew, she might lean out of one of those shabby windows. When passing the café Pat broke into a canter. "Daddy, catch me!" She tried to divert his attention from the bead curtain at the café's entrance; Martin might emerge from behind it, a finger across his mouth, whispering, "Shsh . . . Patricia. Don't tell *him* the race of older brothers is dying out!"

The clock that lived in an iron cage on top of the church tower chimed a long, drawn-out hour, hoarse and shaky. It seemed to say: To France—to go—the three—of us. But whose France the clock itself belonged to, and which three it meant, was unknown to Pat.

It was rather late in the afternoon when they sat on the stone wall outside the village, their backs turned on the road, their feet dangling over a steeply graded vineyard, their baskets overflowing with tinned goods. A valley opened before them, with a rocky crest on the right, a mound of cubes—a town—on their left. Under a somber sky torn to pieces, a pale blue haze drifted among olive trees which looked like shaggy beasts grazing on a slope. But in the air trails of luminous hills were another France. As if poured out of an enormous jug by someone bigger than life, lemon-colored rays oozed through the holes in the sky into the France below. As one of them touched a house, the house flared up and stood blazing in the gloom. Another touched a cypress and the stiff tree fluttered, flamelike. Purple with the effort, the sun broke through the clouds at last and the green valley became one long stretch of violets.

Pat moved nearer to Agnes. "What's all this, Mum?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"It's the Grasse valley, darling."

"I know. But what is it?"

David joined in. "What you see now, Pat, are effects of light."

She shook her hand impatiently, like a kitten trying to catch a fly through a windowpane. "Oh, but I mean *really*. What is it *really*, Daddy?"

He got up. "Come on, girls. A sunset is a sunset. It certainly is not 'the Delectable Mountains over the Valley of the Shadow of Death on the road to Celestial City,' as Mr. Dobson would have it. Where are the eggs? I hope you didn't break them, Pat. I shall make you an *omelette aux confitures* tonight."

She gave a skip and took his free hand. She loved his omelettes. And she was sorry for him. It was a pity he could not see what she saw. For instance, the two Frances in one, changing all the time into something else, hiding away the invisible people and things.

Buttoning up her cardigan, her face changed into a large violet, cool and satiny with golden eyes, Agnes lingered on.

"Dad!" Pat murmured, tugging at his hand, "don't you think Mum's beautiful?"

He raised his eyebrows while scrutinizing the shopping bag. "Yes, dear. Your mother's very good-looking."

They walked down briskly, dangling their parcels over dewy herbs until they reached the *Grand Fontaine* at the bottom of a dell. At its two ends two springs splashed drinking water into marble troughs before meeting on a lower level in a silent pool framed in stone. Trimmed very high to allow more light on the fountain, plane trees stood round, stretching their long spotted necks to the sky.

"Let's stop and have a drink at the old giraffes!" Pat cried.

"You mean the Roman springs," he said.

In the gray-green dusk someone moved; a woman was collecting her washing where it had been left to soak in a stone basin. She also looked gray, while the giraffes still preserved some of the day's luminosity on their skin. Spread on the grass, a piece of washing reflected the deep blue of the darkening sky overhead, and a few equally blue flakes shimmered on the pool. Inside the ring of trees it felt like being in a thickly carpeted, lofty room where sound was muffled. Yet, as Pat unhooked the mug which was fastened to the wall behind the springs, the chain spilled a jet of metallic noises; the woman straightened her back and looked around. David having stopped nearest to her, she saw him first. She started, and a wet rag flopped back into the water out of her hand.

"Oh, is it you, *mon Capitaine?*" she exclaimed in a voice as clear as the metal's. "What a meeting! Well, how are you after all these years? *Bonsoir!*"

"*Bonsoir, Mauricette.*" They shook hands. "It gives me pleasure to see you again. I wasn't lucky on that first evening when we called at the farm."

She fixed on him a gaze the intensity of which could be felt in the dark. "I know, I know," she said. "I was not there. It is the Americans. She . . . the lady, the girl, kept me so late. She was sick."

David cleared his throat. "Oh! I thought they were having a party that night."

The woman laughed. "Oh, but they had! Of course. With them, sick or well, there is always *une* party. Day

and night. Sunday and weekday. Always." She talked fast and loud, as if afraid of being interrupted.

David turned round to where Agnes and Pat were looming in the shadow. "This, Mauricette, is my wife Agnes. And this is Pat, Paul's school friend. They stick their tongues out at each other."

Pat dropped a curtsy, touching the wet hand. A second of suspense passed. Agnes and Mauricette broke the silence, the Frenchwoman gushing a stream of words; Agnes saying *bonsoir, merci, oui*, and *non* with deliberation.

The giraffes had grown taller, their necks stretched to the ever-higher moon. Cicadas rattled, jerked, stopped, rattled on. In the pool below a deep voice said, "Green man." And after a while, "Bad man. . . . Good man. . . . Old man."

Pat's heart stopped, and the end of her nose grew cold. The woman was a liar! Thoughts tore through Pat's head. She lied about that first evening! She had been there at the window, looking out. And she also made Paul tell fibs about Cynthia and Martin being Americans. Lies! Lies! Cynthia's pool of English-speaking toads was right here, at the *Grand Fontaine*. Pat, Mum, and Dad, the three of them, were standing right in the middle of the other France. She opened her mouth. . . .

"Pat!" Agnes said. "Say *bonsoir* to Mme. Mauricette! We'll be going now. It's getting awfully late."

David lifted Mauricette's laundry basket from the ground. "I hope you do not have far to go with this heavy load, Mauricette."

"Oh, no! Just go up the path, to the Abbey. It does not

do a thing to me. I am used to carrying heavy loads." She took the basket from David's hands and placed it on the padded ring on her head, as lightly as if it were a hat.

"So it is your Americans living at the Abbey now!" he clicked his tongue. "That explains its new look. But I thought you lived with your family at the farm."

Her back rigid, her head high, her arms hanging loosely, the woman was already moving up the path, noiseless like a dream person. Without turning, she said in that metal-clear voice of hers, "Well yes, *mon Capitaine*. We live on the farm. We only work at the Abbey. *Bonne nuit*."

She disappeared beyond a giraffe's neck as Cynthia's toads croaked, "Good man. . . . Green man. . . ."

The Monroes climbed to where it was still light on the dell's upper lip, and walked silently across the fields. The smell of jasmine was poignant in the air. As she wrinkled her nose, Pat asked in a subdued tone, "What do they want, the jasmines, Mummy?"

Agnes sighed elaborately. "Don't be silly, Pat. They don't want anything from you. They're beautifully attended to by old Mr. Varioli."

"But they don't let you be!" Pat whispered fiercely. "Surely they must mean something."

For the first time the child's desperate search for non-human sense moved David. "Pat, come here!" he called her.

On her thin legs she hurried obediently toward him. He picked her up and seated her on his left shoulder, clasp- ing her ankles in his right hand. "I'll carry you for a bit, puppy," he said. "It's getting chilly and late. You'd better hold on to my hair as we gallop down."

She did not touch his hair. Like a lady riding a camel, she sat swaying stiffly, overcome by her sudden elevation over the jasmine country, and the strong beat of a man's heart against her weary legs.

9

When Pat and her parents had appeared for the first time on the Varioli farm, Paul had been busy pushing his sisters onto the edge of the common bed where he slept with Jacqueline, who was eight, and Suzanne, six. Mauricette stepped from behind a curtain and raised her hand. "Quiet! It's the English people. . . ." Instead of interrupting himself in his fun, Paul merely pressed his palm against Jacqueline's mouth to keep her from yelling, while he continued to punch her all he pleased. To have stopped entirely was out of the question; English people—tall, rich, old, and dumb—were far too ordinary a sight for him to bother.

It was rather his grandfather's voice calling César that attracted his attention. Baptiste called in his low, angry voice; the voice that presaged a storm. Every time sheep came down from the hills César tried to break loose, and outdo the shepherd dog. Mme. Titine sometimes made bold to grant his wish, and then there was the devil to pay. Paul was the only creature on the farm unafraid of the master; to him those fits of temper were a welcome distraction. And so, after drawing the blankets over the girls' heads, he stole up to the window.

No sign of Mme. Titine; only a tall English pair could be seen in the yard. But since Baptiste's back was turned on them, it was not with them that the old man was angry. Instead he stared at somebody small, standing near the shed, another somebody that, obviously, was not afraid of Baptiste. "Is she English?" Paul asked his mother in astonishment.

"What else would you like her to be?"—she snapped—"since she's the Englishman's daughter. Off with you! Go to your bed."

He did not obey. An English person being a little girl made him all of a sudden realize that girls were strange. This particular one was high on her legs, skinny, and her fair hair, plaited into pigtails, shone in the dark. "What has she done?" he muttered.

"She stroked César, and the dog did not bite her."

"Did he not?" Paul was incredulous. "I wonder how she did it?"

"Just like this." His mother plunged her hand into his tousled curls. "Did I not tell you to go to bed? Old Varioli is cross; it is better not to be in his way now."

She calls Granddad "Old Varioli" because she hates him. All women hate him, that is why I like him, Paul was thinking as he was falling asleep that night.

A few days later he got up early, and before school ran to where the English were camping. The fly of the tent was up, and the door of the station wagon stood ajar. He had no wish to meet any of them face to face, so he hid in the bushes. Soon he heard the rustle of branches and he saw *her*. Down a narrow passage cut only recently through the dense juniper, she stalked barefoot, wearing blue pajamas.

He held his breath and wondered at the way her hair was plaited so neatly at this early hour.

Where the passage broadened into a small clearing, she halted and gathered the plaits under her chin. Looking diffidently at the deep latrine hole in the middle of the clearing, she untied a knot on her stomach and eased her pajamas which fell in two little heaps at her feet. It gave him an unpleasant shock, but the paleness of her flesh fascinated him, and he did not move. The girl seemed uneasy.

As she was about to squat awkwardly at the edge of the hole, she lifted her eyes, attentive and self-willed like a cat's, to where he was hiding in the thicket. They met his and froze. She jumped up; twigs cracked; she disappeared.

Some days later he saw her sitting on a bench in his own *classe* at school; everything around him went black. He forbade himself to look at her. First he had to rearrange the world which she had ruined for him. Instead of the wild beast, a new César had to be created, a docile animal fond of girls' caresses. Instead of blue and red bows poised like silly butterflies on top of black curls, yellow tresses, and pale long legs had to be adopted as outward signs of being a girl. From elderly, the English had to be made into children, and their wooden faces lit by catty eyes. Labor above labors, a foreign voice had to be forgiven for adding its noises to the hubbub in the school playground. Then at last a day came when he could look at Pat; she was just another *different* girl; he stuck his tongue out at her.

One evening, as he was hanging around the Abbey waiting for his mother to go back home with him, he took

a penknife and cut into the bark of a tree the three letters PAT.

Just then Martin happened to pass by. He glanced at Paul's effort and laughed. "What is this, little rascal? Does PAT mean 'Portuguese American Trust' for short?"

Paul did not like Martin's teasing. Looking black, he muttered, "It means Patricia Monroe for short." But he would never have said it could he have foreseen the fuss.

His father and mother took him to the scullery, and locked the door behind them. "Look here," his father said, "that little Miss may be a nice *gosse*, but Mlle. Cynthia and Mr. Martin are not Americans at all, and she is their cousin. Well, Americans or English, they are foreigners. Mlle. Pat's father is not a milord; it is Mr. Martin the milord. They all detest each other. You know Granddad does not like foreigners? *Alors* . . . do not chatter about your family to Mlle. Pat. And the less said about it all at the farm, the better. Your papa will not forget you on your name day. But if you blab—" With his finger Pierre Varioli thrashed the air tellingly.

Mauricette patted Paul on the back. "Why should he blab? Brave men never talk much, especially to people who are here one day and gone the next."

Paul and his mother became great pals after this.

In the evenings, on their way back to the farm, they talked, and the old world went on crumbling. Paul's mother did not like Granddad because she was poor and for a long time he had refused to know her. "Did you get rich one day then?" Paul asked his mother.

She frowned. "Your father found some money and gave it to your granddad to buy a jasmine field. Only then was your father allowed to bring me to live on the farm."

"Where did he find the money?"

"Oh, stop worrying me!" she exclaimed, tears like flames in her eyes.

Another time, when they were late and were taking a short cut through the cemetery, Mauricette shrugged her shoulders at a woman who knelt, deep in prayer, before a tomb. "What foolishness!" she muttered. "Once dead, one is dead for good. I do not believe in another world. Not one that is not on this earth."

"What other world do you believe in, *Maman*?"

She grinned. "America, perhaps England. Paris . . . Cannes."

"Would you like it better in Cannes than on the farm?"

She rolled her big eyes across the sky before they came to rest on his face. "Little idiot!" she said. "Do you not realize that wherever the rich—Mlle. Cynthia, Mr. Martin—choose to stay, they are bound to live in another world than you and me?"

"Do you hate them?" he whispered, suddenly afraid of the tombs, and the new other world, so different from the one with the angels and devils.

She was walking fast between the marble slabs, porcelain garlands and dusty immortals, pushing him before her, scorching his neck with the heat of her breasts. "I envy their being free to live where they choose," she murmured, and he asked:

"Is the English girl going to live in another world, too?"

His mother shook her head. "I do not think so," she said. "She is poor. They sleep under a tent. They cannot afford hotels."

Paul was glad Pat's parents could not afford another

world. He liked the one he lived in: the farm, the village with its shops, its square crowded with hungry cats, its church. . . . More than anything else, he liked sticking his tongue out at the English "*morceuse*." Now that he had discovered she was poor, he could, in the bargain, pull at her pigtails. The certainty of his granddad never permitting him to marry her was making him even bolder. Should she ever get mad at him, he would give her notice, as one does with farm maids, throwing their things out into the yard.

Although he intended to take her back after a time, the idea of giving Pat notice pleased him immensely. Accordingly, he suggested that they play keeping house together. Since both of them lived rather far from school, during midday break they took their provisions outside to a table and bench on the terrace.

"It is hot as hell here," Paul importantly declared one day. "Come quick! I shall show you a cool place. It will be ours any time we want it."

She followed him down a slope to the bottom of a ravine, and into a small stone shed called a *cabanon* which stood hidden among olive trees.

A camp bed, a straw mattress, and an old rug occupied the best part of it; there were also built-in cupboards full of gardening tools fallen into disuse. As she walked in Pat wrinkled her nose. "What is that smell? Owls and bats?" She sat down on the bed. She knew the place though she had never been in it, and said proprietarily, "My dad hid here when there was a war on. He was wounded, and he was a hero."

"You are lying!" Paul snarled. "It is my dad who was the hero. He has an iron arm. Anyway, the English do not hide in *cabanons* in France. If they are rich, they live in

chic places—and under tents if they are poor. You, you are poor, and I am going to call you Jeanne. You will be a maid on my farm, and I shall be the master.”

“All right,” Pat agreed. “I shall be Jeanne d’Arc. I know about her; the teacher explained it yesterday. I do not want to be burnt though.”

“Who said Jeanne d’Arc?” Paul shrugged. “I said Jeanne, the farm maid. The one with the squinting eye. She stole a milk pail and Granddad kicked her out of the house.”

“Oh, no,” Pat cut him short. “Nothing of the sort. I am Jeanne d’Arc. Varioli!”—she changed to a peremptory tone—“Saddle my horse for me! I am going to Rheims with the king to have him crowned in the cathedral. You stay at home, and do not let the English in. All right? I shall be back soon.”

Without waiting for his services, she mounted a broken pitchfork and galloped away into the olive trees, snorting for the horse and listening to the Voices for Jeanne.

All this was much too brisk for Paul, and unbearably out of line. “Oh, *là, là!* so you are Jeanne d’Arc, is that true? And you do not want to be burnt,” he cried. “Very well, you just wait till I find a good tinder to light the stake for you!”

He leaped into the wood and began to collect sticks, while Pat caracoled with her invisible king behind last year’s artichokes. Soon he piled up a fair-sized stake, but no tinder could be found. And so he cried again, “Jeanne, Jeanne! I want you to ride to the shop for me and buy a box of matches!”

Obligingly, she turned around and galloped toward a well overgrown with weeds. Once there, she saluted like a British N.C.O. on parade, and introduced herself. “I am

Jeanne d'Arc, *Mme. l'Eau*. Will you please sell me a box of matches?" Out of her pocket, she took a shilling and threw it into the air. The coin sparkled, then fell in the water with a splash.

Paul rushed to the spot. Leaning over the well he turned on her. "*Crétine, va!* How dare you waste the money I gave you for shopping? Did they not teach you to play make-believe in England? Now go and get it back out of the water!"

Pat blinked, but remained composed. "You told a lie," she said. "You did not give me any money at all. That is the shilling my Dad gave me on the boat when we were crossing. Besides, Jeanne d'Arc cannot possibly dive in. She is wearing armor. Go and get the shilling yourself if you do not want to pay for your matches. But I think it is mean."

"You are mean and a liar yourself." Paul seized her by the arm and tried to drag her to the stake.

Kicking and biting, they struggled till he had her down on her knees, her wrists tied together with a piece of string. But as they fought they did not shriek or cry, and the sharper the pain the more aware they seemed of the need for secrecy. With mouths sealed, their pink lips were like scars in their drawn faces. At last he managed to throw her on the straw mattress; then he backed out and bolted the door from the outside.

Swift as a hare he dashed off through the olive grove up to the Abbey. Near the incinerator his mother always kept a box of kitchen matches handy. Soon he was back, striking the matches and poking them between the dry twigs. It did not take long for the little flames to grow.

As they began to lick the thicker wood Paul whistled

for joy and turned to fetch his prisoner, but another whistle answered his, and he stopped short.

Her eyes, wide and yellow, staring into the fire, Pat stood in the *cabanon's* open door, the string hanging loosely from her wrist. Paul opened his mouth, but no sound came. Jeanne d'Arc or no Jeanne d'Arc, now he knew she was a witch. Dogs cringed at her, fetters on her wrists came loose by themselves, bolted doors opened at her bidding.

In one leap he was at her side. Their hands clasped, they trembled with excitement. Their great secret, their common guilt, blazed in front of them, in defiance of the grownup world.

"Will you burn down the grove?" Pat asked in a whisper.

"Do you want me to?" Paul's teeth chattered.

"Yes." Her cheeks were aflame.

He released her hand. His back hunched, his knees bent like an old man's setting off on his daily job, he went back to the fire and blew hard at the flames. Eager and noisy, the blaze rose till it reached the branches of an olive tree.

Only then, his mouth twisted in a cry, did Paul shoot for the well. At the same time cries came from somewhere up in the Abbey gardens. "Fire, fire! Help!" an Englishwoman's voice called on a note of pleasant surprise. "Fire, fire! Help!" a Frenchman yelled frantically.

Two people came thundering down the terraces, straight on to the stake. Cynthia stopped at a yard's distance from Pat. Breathless, like the unbelieving Thomas she stretched out her hand to touch the body. "Pat, darling . . . is it you, really?" she cried. "In France?"

But Pierre lost no time asking questions. "Paul!" he

shouted. "Give me that bucket! Run up to the house for a hose! Fetch *Maman* and Mr. Martin!"

In no time a hose was screwed on to the irrigation tap. Mauricette handled it while Pierre crushed the flames with a vine-perch, and Martin, giggling nervously, threw on buckets of water. Holding the children by the hand Cynthia watched the scene.

Before long there was not a live spark left. Bluish smoke trailed up the hill.

Wiping the sweat off his face, Pierre fastened a stern gaze on his son. "Now, little beggar," he said hoarsely, "you will tell me who did it."

Paul drew nearer to Cynthia, but Pat stepped forward, detaching her hand from Cynthia's. "*Moi*, Mr. Varioli," she said. "I wanted him to burn down the olive grove."

"Oh, but why, darling?" Cynthia gasped. "Why did you want him to burn up the olive grove?"

"Because I was Jeanne d'Arc and I didn't want him to burn me," Pat said gravely, and turned to collect her things.

10

Amid prickly plants, under a relentless sun, Agnes and David had had an intimate half hour, and so there now stretched before her that month of a hope in which he shared only halfheartedly. Should he materialize, the mythical "boy" might prove even more of a mystery than Pat

was; as things stood there were already enough family problems for David.

The luminous mornings of the South set Agnes off as a glass case sets off a dead butterfly; colors glimmering, wings spread for some unearthly flight. She looked ambiguous, threatening. In the new surroundings, it humiliated him to see her so unscathed, and his humiliation was lined with fear. The wings of the dead butterfly quivered; at any moment the glass might break, and she would fly away into something as mysterious as Pat's *lucioles* and *lutins*. He watched Agnes lift heavy objects, scour frying pans, fight the ants, put a flower behind her ear, and he marveled at his inaptitude for making this willing young flesh and candid mind completely his own.

One morning he got up earlier than usual, intending to wake Agnes and get her to join him on the mattress under his tent. He wanted to talk to her in a way he never had before.

Explain; perhaps, ask forgiveness. Some months before, after a scene occasioned by her buying an old French clock in the naive effort to re-create some of the Trusfield splendor in their suburban villa, he had grabbed his bedding and dumped it on the studio couch. Ever since, it needed much maneuvering on her side, and many a ridiculous pretense on his, to make them spend a night together in the bedroom. Among other things, when planning for their gypsy vacation, he had hoped that life in the open would bring them together in a natural way. Barefoot, moving carefully so as not to disturb Pat, or frighten her mother in case Agnes was not asleep any longer, he now approached the car with a rapid heart. But Agnes was not in the car. Across her pillow lay Pat's arm, her blankets thrown back.

He would have cried out in sudden panic if the bushes had not parted just then, and Agnes in her ridiculously short pajamas had not emerged from the thicket, all pink in the rising sun.

"Hullo, David," she said passing by him on her way to the hydrant. "Don't you think we're in for a week's *tramontane*? The Esterel looks so near."

He frowned. June was not a month of *tramontane*, but she had discovered about the Esterel and the local winds all by herself. She was talking to him, but her mind and body were in the sun, the hills, the wind, anywhere but his tent.

Choking with the unspoken, humble words, he turned on his heel.

Disappointment in his marriage was a chronic ailment with David. Instead of joining him on his road to public salvation, Agnes had lured him into a private world not any less tortuous than the one in Trusfield and the French Domaine. He had not reckoned with Agnes; all he wanted was a wife. The Anglo-Saxon mania of referring to even public figures by their Christian names vexed him. He much preferred the old French way of the Maid of Orléans and the Sun King, or the modern Russian symbolism of the plaster athlete with a hammer in one hand and a sickle in the other, marching in step with a huge female nonchalantly carrying a sheaf of wheat across a sexless shoulder.

Now Agnes never let him forget that she was a particular kind of woman. One with a tendency to plumpness, freckles on her nose, red hair that needed rinsing in camomile; one with a long list of family birthdays ever present in her mind, another list, that of Christmas presents,

appearing on her desk in early October; a woman to whom kissing, frowning, sneezing, coping with the laundryman, not to speak of sleeping and menstruating, were infinitely more important than getting another left-winger into parliament.

He scorned himself for wanting her again and again, forgot what he scorned when he held her embraced, then the sore in his mind reopened at the most carnal moment, and the pleasure was spoiled. He wanted Agnes to betray dissatisfaction with a gesture or word that would make of the day a point of no return. No such gesture or word was forthcoming; he longed for it, but he dreaded it, too.

His disappointment in "progressive" society went, perhaps, even deeper. It had started in Spain. The visits of the international intellectuals to the Red Front had reminded him of theatrical previews in London and Paris, with a backstage party ready for the critics, publicity men meeting the stars, and producers uncorking the bottles. Only in Spain at that time the champagne was blood, and the actors were slaughtering their own brothers in the village square.

Pierre's and Mauricette's friendship had helped him to forget. Soon after he had parted with them, he went to Trusfield on leave. The place had long since become but a holiday camp for the family and friends. On that particular morning the old house, reduced through war austerity to two scantily heated rooms without even Beryl to turn them upside down, looked indeed glum.

Scottie, the housekeeper, was serving him breakfast. Letting the toast burn on the fork planted in the fireplace, she said: "Isn't it a shame, Master David, our Agnes has to be stuck at that blooming college, and not a boy to take

her out on a Saturday night, and she so smart! I wish you could see the party frock I made her, Master David. . . .”

Mrs. Isobel Scott never doubted that the Monroes were put on earth to patronize Hilary, her husband, the perfect porter who also knew how to make dandelion wine; herself, their providence; and the world’s most beautiful, most clever girl, Agnes. That they should provide for Agnes’ education was only natural. That they should neglect to provide Agnes with social fun was an oversight.

He had missed the poetic sense of the complaint. The cord of loneliness in his own heart was touched instead, and indignation for Agnes flared up. The philanthropic brutes! Look what they had done to a happy working-class girl, throwing her into the wilderness of neurotic snobs! As a matter of fact, he was responsible for it. The prewar scene of long ago came back to him in all its absurdity. His father, his older brother, and himself discussing Hitler over their coffee after lunch.

“I say, David,” his father was saying, “it’s all very well to be sublime in the common rooms at Christ College. But I’m telling you, never before were business prospects with Germany as good as they are now, under that man Hitler.”

He remembered John’s grin and comment: “Davvie doesn’t like Hitler’s mustache. He’s partial to Russian beards.” Then they all got up and headed for the terrace.

And there she stood, right outside the French window, her plaits down, smiling broadly. His father, as he walked up to her, shouted in his usual, jocular way: “Hullo, Agnes! and what d’you think of Hitler, young woman?” God knows what mixture of guilty conscience (she was not supposed to play on the terrace) and the wish to show off made her answer: “He’s got an ugly name, sir. It sounded like ‘hit ’er’.”

They laughed, and his father turned to him. "Well, it's your day, son. Since you don't want the horse or the cruise, what about my giving you this clever child's education as your coming-of-age present?"

The memory was embarrassing. Little had he thought of his living birthday present during the years of globe-trotting and truth-hunting!

He thanked Scottie for her toast, and took a train to Agnes' college.

He was struck by the girl's good looks. The creamy smoothness of her cheeks, something radiantly eager in her eyes, reminded him of Mauricette. She's healthy, she's simple, he thought. With her I'm safe. It did not occur to him at that time that being safe with Agnes simply meant being physically attracted to her.

He bought more drinks than were good for either of them; then he took her to a country hotel for the night. Now he preserved but a faint remembrance of what that night had been. On his next leave he married Agnes Scott.

There had been no honeymoon, no marriage apprenticeship; in the war years that followed there was nothing but the uneasy fact of baby Pat's existence, and a few more leaves spent in a do-or-die mood, which had left them bruised, scared, and hungry.

The war came to an end. Most of those who had shared with David their repudiation of the old order returned to their jobs, families, hobbies, and perversions. In the clubs and offices, as he argued with his co-religionists of the New Faith, some of them party members, some well-wishers like himself, he seldom heard of personal sacrifice, often enough of the good money a communist state was ready to pay for a good brain offered unconditionally.

David Monroe began to scrutinize his own reputedly disinterested motives, and the conclusions he arrived at were sad. Dispossessed, he hated those who possessed; deprived of an aristocrat's right to the titled class, he favored a classless society; son and brother of lunatic females, he craved for a "simple" wife. And yet . . . yet . . . at the bottom of that well of hypocrisy there still throbbed the source of his unrest: blood—blood spilled by a man for no reason at all; the blood of a crucified bat.

Seasons melted into past, life ebbed while he criticized the old world without accepting the new one, and the void around him expanded. Ten years after his marriage to Agnes, David was a lonely man, no longer safe with her. She was still creamy and occasionally radiant, but her eagerness had been absorbed in secret thoughts and a few friendships which fulfilled her need for companionship and action.

Pat grew. Her inviolate remoteness provoked him; one day he considered her feeble-minded, another, a genius; to be thus cut off from the future in his own home was depressing. But Agnes took their child's nature perfectly in her stride. "Well," she would say, "Pat is not interested in what we do and think. So what? Let her be. When she asks me a question, most of the time I know she doesn't expect an answer." What a mockery! David hated the mysteries behind an unanswered question. Pat's illness offered a break. And so—O man's eternal foolishness!—to cure his daughter's and his own sickness, he chose the village of Freillans in the land of the crucified bat.

It was nearly noon when he arrived at the autocar's terminus in Vence. The ochre-painted houses grilled

quietly in the sun. In the *Place de la Cathédrale* the church did not attract his attention. But outside a café a menu was displayed boasting of a three-course lunch at 650 francs. He pushed the door open, and saw a low-ceilinged room with all the tables taken by workmen in dungarees and a few men of the cheaper intellectual sort. A sad-faced *patronne* came to greet him and suggested lunch in the bar. He followed her into it. A caricature of Flaubert sat at one table, his mustache soaked in absinthe; the other table was offered to David. A waitress emerged from behind the zinc counter. She had sunken eyes and a dried-up mouth; great warmth radiated from her withered form. A dish called "Larks without heads," a sort of rissoles, was quickly served, and all through the meal "Flaubert" seemed not to notice the newcomer. But as David was preparing to drain the last of his half litre of a rather potent *rosé*, the Flaubert-looking type suddenly burst into song. Shifting his glassy eyes from the *patronne* to David's flask and back, he roared, "*Ma belle*, don't begrudge your guest that drop of your own dew!"

"I have nothing against singing at meals," she said. "But you must not be impertinent, Henri."

"I am not being impertinent," Henri brayed. "I am quoting a poet. What is wrong with quoting unknown poets? A man was killed where that English bungler is now forcing your delicious larks down his throat, and you did not call *that* impertinent."

The *patronne's* mouth quivered. She leaned over David. "Do not pay attention to the old poacher, Monsieur. It is well over thirty years he is drinking himself dead like this, and poisoning my life. How he can still handle a gun is beyond me."

Just then a slender young man with a beautiful face drifted into the room. Sheets of music peeped out of the pocket of his blazer. Passing David's table he stared meaningly at him. He hopes I'm a pansy, David thought, and was amused. The *éphèbe* blushed as he retreated to the vacant seat in the restaurant, where he immediately spread the music over the table and took up his pen.

While the *patronne* with a motherly smile followed the movements of the youth, an invalid hobbled in noisily on a wooden leg. A man in his sixties, he had a *Croix de guerre* pinned on his blue cotton blouse. The fake Flaubert winked and motioned him to the chair near him. But the other scoffed, "*Merde!* I do not want your lousy drink."

Flaubert sprang to his feet. "You dirty fascist swine! You wait—I'll break your neck for you!" Leaving his thin, shabby wallet and a packet of Gauloises on the table, he slammed the door behind him. Unperturbed, the *patronne* threw the wallet under the counter and turned to another party. But the warmth-radiating waitress poured some Pernod into a glass, and handed it to the cripple. "Here, Louis," she said. "Your usual." As their hands met she seemed to melt into bliss.

Louis limped up to David's table. Interspersed with dialect, toothless and alcohol-laden, his emphatic whisper was not easy to follow. He knowingly appraised the stranger's countenance. "Monsieur is English," he said. "That is good. As a matter of fact, I love freedom, too. *Le type* who just left says I am a fascist because I killed a traitor just where you are now sitting. Well, yes, I did. He tumbled down and lay under the table where your feet are. *Eh, oui*. The police were entering the place when I took to my legs."

"How did you escape?"

"Through there." Louis pointed to a curtain on the back wall. "It is the kitchen door. A lorry waited for me in the yard outside. They whisked me away."

"Why was the man a traitor?"

"He worked for the Germans. Henri knew it."

"Why does he call you a fascist then?"

"It is simple. In the *Résistance* we were working with the English. And De Gaulle was in England. De Gaulle is an anti-communist; *alors?*"

"Is Henri a communist then?"

Louis shrugged his shoulders. "That is what he thinks he is because he reads books. The police say I am one." He stared at the brick floor, and with two fingers of his right hand mimicked the spraying movement of a machine gun. "Tac—tac—tac—tac—. It is because I want justice all round." He drew close to David's ear. "Ever heard of the Toulon tunnel affair?" His breath was making David sick. "*Non? Oui?* Well, I paid for it with this—" he squinted at the *Croix de guerre*. "Yes; justice is all I want."

Slowly he unbent and cast a proud glance into the emptying restaurant where the young musician still scribbled away. Louis jerked his head in that direction. "I am not like that one there. . . . Money is all *he* wants."

As if feeling their attention focused on him, the young man blinked candidly.

"You mean he writes music for money?"

Louis bared his gums. "Ahuh! Russian music. Good red music for good red francs." Again his fingers played their little trick of machine-gunning. "He has an open account here. The *patronne* would like to sleep with him, but what? The fellow is an 'aunt.'" He thrust out his narrow

chest. "Luckily, I do not have any trouble with that sort of thing." He prodded David's shoulder with his finger. "Don't you believe, *Monsieur*, that all your nice clean English money went into buying nice clean German corpses either! I myself know of *un animal*, not very far from here at that, who bought his father a jasmine field with money dropped from heaven into the French *maquis*. . . . You might have met him. He is the one I heard boasting to you the other day in a café about his deeds at the Toulon tunnel. *Farceur, va!* He lost his arm in a silly mix-up." He stared fiercely at David who felt color mounting to his cheeks.

At this moment, somber but subdued, Henri re-entered the bar to claim his wallet and the Gauloises. Nervously, David shook hands with Louis. "Thanks for telling me," he said and bit his tongue. Why thank the man? The information was depressing and perfectly useless.

As he was paying the bill, the *patronne* raised to him her mournful eyes. "I am sorry *Monsieur* was importuned. The war left much unhappiness behind . . ."

In the *Place de la Cathédrale* the sun lay heavily on the pavement, scorching his feet as he walked. He welcomed the heat and the walking; they relieved his melancholy feelings after Louis' revelations. In the fumes of *rosé* "larks without heads" seemed to sing in his insides as he passed garlands of washing across blazing walls, closed shops reeking of spices and liquor, shadowy squares where fountains lisped, green shutters behind which babies shrieked, and women in the back yards who laughed at men slumbering like satyrs on stone benches. The restaurant scene was sinking into the past as rapidly as England and

its people. The present in Vence was formidable; he felt so big he could almost take a step into eternity.

Through visions of sea and hills; through building sites where masons potted about in clouds of saffron dust; through carnation fields with their own miniature rains drizzling from non-existent skies he walked, and Pierre remained unexplained, and David did not mind.

In that state of euphoria his attention was arrested by a building a little off and below the road. Brand new, of small dimensions and irregular shape, dazzlingly white, with a slender wrought-iron tower and blue roof like frozen waves, it had about it a look of aseptic cleanliness. *Chapelle Matisse* read the notice on the wall.

As he looked in, the white nuns and white passages nearly drove him away. Shyness prevented him from retreating, and so he entered that aquatic luminosity, the immaculate body of the chapel.

On his previous European travels, the flamboyant twilight of the Catholic churches and the fleshiness of their saints had repelled him. Nor in the Protestant churches was there much purity; eagles with rapacious beaks and golden wings on which the Bible of the Pharisees lies open were installed where the fat angels had been. But here in this unusual place, notions of color, shape, and history deserted him; he was in the midst of a silence that rose in abstract circles toward someone he could not see.

David's mother, of course, had had too much sense of humor to teach her children how to pray. At school, as soon as he was strong enough to bear the burden of mysteries, he had shed religion. Later on, he developed an almost mystic belief in socialism. Now he was inclined to a sweeter, a nonpolitical faith, the worship of Reason.

In France his childish nightmare of crucifixion was dispelled by a couple of selfless "proletarians." But in the immense clarity of the Provençal day, proletarians now eluded him. France itself eluded him. He stood in the luminous silence of the Matisse chapel, and knew not the name of his suffering, not even the object of his adoration. Picking here an arm bent under the weight of a cross, there a dove in flight, elsewhere a woman's dolorous mouth, his eyes wandered across the gleaming walls. Here the story of Christ's Passion was told in modern shorthand. It probably was intended to be the story of Mankind. But it looked more like the story of a man and his mother; a man and a woman; a man and his friends; a man and his enemies. A story of love; the private story.

David's eyes searched desperately for the shape of an idea; they found the altar. But it was a simple table, with no symbol above it and no food on it. Finally he lifted his gaze up the blue window. . . . It was a vertical field of flowers blooming in a glassy light. He could not bear all this irrational brightness, and he shut his eyes.

11

With no furniture to polish and no curtain to creep behind, Agnes found the world immense. The ceaseless chirruping of cicadas, the garrulous voices of the people in the fields, the uncouth noises of the motorbikes on the road puzzled her, but she was not afraid.

She was not afraid because the evenings were like a sea of lavender. The gloom of a moonless night was blue. She waked in the morning flooded in crystal-clear light, orange on the surface, but sapphire inside. Over brown faces, pink walls, green slopes, and crimson roses, blue shadows lay in daytime. And the air tasted so rich she had to digest it, like food.

One afternoon after school she did not find Pat in front of the butcher's shop as agreed. She waited for half an hour, then walked up to the school to see the mistress. The woman suggested Mme. Monroe should look for her daughter at the house of the employers of M. Varioli, Jr. Paul and Pat being great friends, she said, the little girl might have been tempted to go with him to where his parents worked.

Agnes was shown a short cut through the vineyards. But when she heard the name of the place, her heart sank. It was the Abbey; a landmark on the map of David's forbidden past.

Between Monroe Park and the gardens of the Abbey there was no gate. Aware only of decayed nakedness and the closed shutters above an overgrown cypress hedge, she passed by the villa. Then the path led up to the graveled yard, bright with geraniums, of which she had caught a glimpse from the road the first time she drove to the village with David and Pat. The house itself would look austere in any less luminous surroundings. Not the slightest attempt was made here to relieve the monotony of the walls, or the irregularity of the windows. And still the Abbey breathed luxury. Framed in flowers, a swimming pool glimmered beyond the yard; smooth lawns descended in terraces to an olive grove at the bottom of a ravine. A few

palms, a eucalyptus, and a summerhouse enclosed the view, while hills with cone-like villages on their tops provided the background.

As Agnes lingered outside the front door, she heard a child giggle. On the further side of the pool, under a tree, Paul stood on a bench, naked but for the scarf around his hips, fanning himself with a large leaf. In front of him, his back turned toward Agnes, a young man in shorts sat before an easel, painting. From the pool came the rhythmic sound of arms and legs raking the water. Soon bare feet pattered on the stone curb, and a girl in a wet bikini stepped out of the pool into the late afternoon glow. She was tall and bronzed; her body shone in the oblique sun-rays. It was Cynthia.

Agnes gasped, but it was no good running away; Pat was nowhere to be seen, but Agnes could hear her. On the lower terrace a voice chattered on a strident note in a language that was neither English nor French.

The shrubs quivered; Pat appeared on the lawn, as naked as Paul. "Look at my tummy!" she cried. "I'm not a bird any longer. I'm a firefly."

With two ribbons tied around her waist she had fastened a flashlight on her belly; in the sun its light was scarcely visible. Beating the air with outspread arms, she rushed past the painter and his model right into the embrace of Cynthia who squatted on the grass to receive her. In the thick light they all looked like insects caught in amber.

Agnes felt her throat tighten and her eyes dilate. There was too much in the scene—of what? Candor? Bliss? Impudent beauty? "Pat!" she called. "Pat . . . you're very naughty!"

With one movement four heads were turned toward her.

"Mum!" Pat shrieked.

"Agnes!" two grownup voices exclaimed.

The amber paradise fell apart yielding its happy prisoners; Martin, Cynthia, Pat, and Paul. They stared at her guiltily, as if she were Gabriel of the flaming sword. Pat untied the pink bow, dropped the torch, and reached for her clothes. Paul slid down the bench and crept into the summerhouse. Martin unscrewed the canvas and turned it over on the easel. Cynthia stood up, and squeezed the water out of her hair.

"Hullo, Agnes," she said. "I'm sorry we let the child be late. What's the time now?"

The question sounded so futile. Between the actual moment and the day when Agnes had pleaded with David to let Cynthia and Martin stay for tea at their Chelsea flat, the time was eternity. She helped Pat into her clothes. They parted with the cousins in silence.

But once out of earshot, Agnes burst out, "Pat, why on earth didn't you tell me Martin and Cynthia were here, and that you were seeing them?"

The girl looked thoughtful. "I didn't know you wanted me to," she said. "Because Dad would fuss." And after a second's hesitation: "I'm seeing a lot of people, anyway."

"What sort of people?"

"All sorts."

"Oh, you drive me nuts! What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry, Mum, I can't explain. The French master says English children are bad at composition."

"Now, stop it, Pat! I'm not asking you to write a French

essay for me. I want you to tell me, in plain English, who these people are that you're seeing."

Pat, sulky, dragged her feet. "It's not only at the Abbey that I see them . . ." she brought out, then tossed her head. "What's the good of talking? Most of the time *you* can't see my people."

"What d'you mean? Why can't I see them?"

"Because . . . Oh, I don't know, Mummy." She shrugged her off. "Perhaps they are in-vi-sable, that's all."

After escorting her daughter to school the next morning, Agnes, her spine rigid with determination, embarked once more on a trek to the Abbey.

The first person she saw was Pierre spraying the lawn. "*Bonjour, Madame,*" he said gaily, not looking her in the face. "Madame wishes to see . . . ? I'll go at once and announce Madame. Although Mlle. Cynthia and M. Martin are very informal indeed . . ." He smiled rapidly. "Madame will understand, *n'est-ce pas?*"

He went into the house and she understood that he knew more about David's family than he cared to admit, and he disliked her coming.

In the vast hall with a white-and-black marble staircase in the middle, Cynthia appeared enframed in an open arch leading to a room on the right. It was pleasantly cool. The shutters were closed, but the walls radiated a somber glow like the golden background of a medieval altarpiece. As she moved about Cynthia's raven hair caught the warm reflections. She deposited her armful of flowers on a console and smiled. "What a lovely idea, Agnes, Martin'll be delighted. Come and talk to us. We're practically doing nothing."

Treading softly in her string *espadrilles*, she led the way down a flight of gray stone steps. In the basement another hall opened on a vaulted chamber which might have been a wine cellar once or the monks' refectory but looked Moorish now, with ogive-shaped windows set high and a fountain splashing at the center of a mosaic basin.

Martin, dressed in white, lay on his back on a sofa, knees crossed high, foot pointing to the ceiling. He smoked and did not budge. "Hullo, Agnes," he said. "D'you mind? I'm feeling lazy."

The girls sat down on low seats, the "Wicked Ones" looking at Agnes, who looked at the fountain. Why, she thought, even without looking, I *can* see Pat's people: their laziness, their charm, their loathing of the real world. . . .

"I'm sorry to disturb you," she said. "I came about Pat. You know her father doesn't want her to see his family. I'm afraid he doesn't realize the Abbey now belongs to you. Pat didn't tell us."

"Of course she wouldn't, Agnes," Martin chanted. "She's as close as an oyster. Haven't you noticed? I should trust her with the diamonds of the Crown. Wouldn't you, Cynthia?"

"I suppose I would, darling, if I had them." Cynthia moved from her seat over to the rug on the floor where she made herself comfortable with some cushions. "But I understand Agnes' position. David wants his child to be a little monster of the 'Let's pretend we love toil and sweat' kind. It makes it very difficult for Agnes."

"It's not a matter of pretending." Agnes felt loyal and angry. "David wants people to have a sense of their responsibilities and to speak the truth. Neither you, Martin, nor Cynthia would teach Pat those things, would you?"

Martin puffed out smoke into a nice curly column. "Certainly not!" he joyfully admitted. "We don't want to teach anyone anything, do we, Cynthia? Oh, by the way, Agnes, d'you smoke?"

To compose herself, Agnes lit up. Resting her cheek on her arm, Cynthia looked up at her from the floor. "Martin!" she called. "Come here and have a look at Agnes from below. Her head seems to grow out of the fountain. That's how you should paint her, darling."

Abandoning his sofa, he came to stretch out beside his sister on the rug. "Well, yes. Seen from here, she does look like an early Chagall or something. But how d'you think I could paint her from here? Lying on my belly? Most uncomfortable, I must say."

Agnes stubbed out her cigarette on the floor. "There's no need to worry, Martin. I'll never sit for you."

"Oh, but why not?" they cried in unison. "Don't you like having your portrait painted? You are beautiful, you know."

"I never had my portrait painted—" Agnes was getting nervous. "But that's not the point. The point is I want you both to promise you'll never lure Pat again into visiting you."

Two pairs of eyes with but one gaze stared at her, in silence.

"Queer," Cynthia muttered after a while. "It's queer how cruel good people are."

Martin sighed. "Why are you trying to be cruel, Agnes? Do you think it's necessary for the salvation of your soul?"

Ideas faded out of Agnes' mind, laying bare a painful nerve: the goodness and cruelty of David to her. "I'm not trying to be good . . ." she stammered. "I mean . . . cruel."

They burst out laughing. Like two pigeons, their heads thrown back on their full necks, they gurgled with delight.

"There, Agnes!" Martin wiped off a tear. "You said it yourself. It's fatal! You can't be good without being cruel. It's the Victorian golden rule. Well, dammit, I'd rather be wicked than cruel."

Cynthia chuckled. "Good for you, darling! But you, Agnes, were not born cruel; you don't come from a good family. Scottie was a dear. . . . She always let us eat butter with sugar in the pantry till we were sick. Didn't she, Martin?"

Agnes' nostrils distended in the effort to catch the far-off smell of vanilla, ginger, smoked bacon, cinnamon—the Trusfield Hall pantry. She relived the cramp in her stomach which she had had from overeating those dainties. She could almost feel on her face the touch of young Master David's cologne-scented sponge as her mother stealthily wiped her face with it in the Blue Room. "Why d'you say it would be cruel not to let Pat see you?" she asked in a blank voice.

"Because she loves us, and we love her!" Martin cried. "It's as simple as that."

Cynthia nestled her head on his shoulder. "D'you know, Agnes, what your daughter says?" She spoke languidly, tired of the obvious. "She says she likes talking to us because we don't ask stupid questions as other grown-ups do."

"Oh, yes, she's very happy at the Abbey," Martin beamed at his sister. "As a matter of fact, Agnes, the Abbey suits her so beautifully that it gave Cynthia the idea of

settling the property on her. So she did! Yes, Agnes, she did! Didn't you, my darling?"

He tickled Cynthia's ear with a bit of grass, and she bit his fingers gently, like a well-bred puppy. "Why, yes," she admitted. "I had the papers signed at the notary public the other day—making over the Abbey to Patricia Monroe and her rightful heirs." She smiled. "Which, of course, means for so long as the commies let her have it."

Martin's eye sparkled. "It may be for quite a bit yet, darling. Uncle David is himself a prominent revolutionary. . . . And he's the legal guardian."

As he said it, he tugged at Cynthia's necklace; it opened, and with an elegant sweep he threw it into the water. "There, that's better." He passed a hand over her bare throat. "Why are you wearing those cheap little horrors from the Rivoli Arcade? I'll buy you better jewelry in Mexico."

"You're a cheap little horror yourself!" she laughed.

With flushed faces, they began to fight, rolling over and over on the rug till Cynthia's head rested on the green tile of the fountain's edge. With Martin's hand around its neck, it lay there face upward like a flower on a leaf.

"Shall I punish you for insulting your brother, water lily?"

For a second it was as if they both went dead. Then they fell apart, sat up, and burst into laughter again.

"He's a savage, Agnes, isn't he?" Cynthia fished her necklace out of the water. "Mexico is just the country for him."

"D'you mean you'll go to Mexico soon?"

Martin smoothed down his hair. "Of course, we're

going to Mexico soon. We both are savages, aren't we, my precious?" He kissed Cynthia's hand.

They all got up.

"Time for another bathe, little brother," Cynthia yawned. She glanced at Agnes' bare shoulders. "Look, Martin! Pat says her mother's a violet, but Agnes has Titian flesh."

Like big, lazy cats they examined her, their eyes narrowed.

"After all, why not a tall violet with Titian flesh, Cynthia? The main thing about a violet is not its size; it's the pathetic little perfume which says, 'Please pick me. I won't mind whatever you do to me.' I call that beautiful modesty, don't you?" He swept an arm round Agnes' waist. "Come on, Titian, Pat told us you don't go traipsing with your husband on his knowledgeable pursuits. Why don't you come and see us often? We won't rape Patsy. Not even morally, I promise."

On her way back to the village Agnes walked down the steep path without even looking under her feet. Her head throbbed with memories, her heart with longings. Forgotten faces . . . shadows of things to come . . . things that had gone, zigzagging back and forth upon each other, like the path. What of David? Was the Abbey truly to be Pat's, or was it all part of a huge joke?

Tense as if she were moving in a crowd watching her and wondering: What do *you* think she looks like? Scottie's daughter? David's wife? A violet . . . ? She knew she did not care what she was, so long as she could enjoy a joke and the sun.

In the middle of a melon plot she stopped, pulled a mirror out of her handbag, and looked into it. She saw

violet eyes and smiled. Then she pressed a bare arm to her mouth and bit her Titian flesh. The pain gave her pleasure. She thought: I'm in France, in France. Deeply she breathed in the air; in France even the air had sex.

12

In her young days Agnes had been a great wanderer around the village pond, raptly sniffing at scents and shapes in the green world at Trusfield. Her expulsion from it had been a minor tragedy, compensated much later by the more sophisticated delights of the Meadows in Oxford where, after graduating from a boarding school, she found herself a student.

In those early explorations of nature she never lost herself; she inhaled, she watched, she swam and walked, always aware of being outside the elements so neatly distributed over the landscape. She also realized the part they played in the country's fine arts. Weeping willows over stagnant waters were a Wedgwood motif; commons with grazing cows, cottages and carts, were visions of Constable. Ladies in Gainsborough hats, fox hunting, fishing, horse and boat racing, had their well-defined place in the panorama of England's gracious living, in which without being directly involved she took immense pride.

After David had consented to move from their Chelsea flat to a villa in one of the outmoded London suburbs, she set great store by the back garden. But there the wall and

the hedge were ever-present reminders of her waiting for him. The poplars, the lime trees, the hawthorns were so many monuments to a useless desire, and so she turned away from nature.

In the totally different world of a peasant south it seemed at first that David, too, would change. He sawed and chopped, dug and raked, and taught Pat how to be a good camper. He also did not cast reproving glances at Agnes, and that midday break when they plunged together into the bracken had been one of the most impassioned moments in their marriage. But to get Pat to sleep with no solid roof over her head in the vibrating night of Provence proved more difficult than it had been in the Victorian house with its creaking floors and the cars bustling outside. Since there was no one to baby-sit for them under the French stars Agnes did not press the point of sleeping with David. Any day, she speculated, he will tire of the barbaric existence, and we will move to a hotel where Pat will get a room of her own. Then, perhaps, what she had waited for so long would happen; he would open his heart.

Soon, however, the London routine returned; the only change being that, instead of disappearing from the street on his way to the office, he walked out of the tent straight into the blue. And as he emerged from his motor-coach expeditions in the evening, his shopping bag sometimes full, sometimes empty, he sat on a tree stump under the moon instead of writing under the studio lamp, and smoked or whistled under his breath, answering Agnes' questions in an undertone. He was reading—he said—in a library in Nice for the work on Spartacus which he intended to undertake now that the money that had come to him on the death of an uncle was safely steered into his bank.

Agnes believed in her lucky star. Since the day they had met in the Trusfield pantry, she a brat of four, he a thirteen-year-old on vacation from Eton, she had admired David. First, his Sunday best with collar and hat, and his everyday worst with knees the color of a ripe plum and straw in his hair; then his hungry eyes which faded out of her sight in the evening, his nervous hands, his uppish voice; still later, his indifference to her, the trouble he was giving his family, his skepticism about everything she held obvious, his enthusiasm about everything she held to be dubious. And whom of all the unlikely people did he finally choose to be his wife but her?

While accepting his ostracism of Trusfield Hall, she yet enjoyed having groceries delivered to the address of the Hon. Agnes Monroe in London. She enjoyed daffodils in Hyde Park, snow in Trafalgar Square, fog in the suburbs, regattas at Henley, having a husband, a child, reasonably good clothes, a big house for three, her Oxford diploma with no need to use it, her health, her looks, and the diamond brooch which Beryl Bobo, the new Countess, had given her for a wedding present.

She liked parties though David did not; he went to them only to meet someone clever of particular interest to him. On these rare occasions she slipped into her Harrod's silk and wore it proudly for an hour or two, smiling at men and women alike, taking mental notes of the food, the hairdos, the furniture, and the conversation. On ordinary days she gossiped with neighbors and shop people, and there was always a schoolfriend to go to pictures with. She read a great deal; reading was where much of the unpleasantness with David had started. He refused to discuss novels, yet when she dutifully plowed through some

of the heavy stuff and questioned the contents, he showed an angry face. It was something in her character rather than her intelligence that made him unhappy, she knew it; but to put things right other words were needed, not the sharp, glittering ones he threw at her.

What *was* patience? Mrs. Isobel Scott had lectured her daughter: "So long as they don't bite you, don't try and get under people's skins queryin' and complainin', my lass. . . ." This was Agnes' recipe for patience. It happened at nighttime that David acted as if he wanted to punish her for some secret crime, but days were fairly clear of bite, and she didn't doubt that she would live to hear again those "other" words which he had uttered to her only once, in Reading.

She knew how to switch off the present and fall into memories, checking and rechecking on facts, reshaping the basis for hope. One morning in France as David and Pat left, she forgot to wait for them to reappear on the road below, waving good-bye; she never did it again; in the early freshness she herself was anxious to withdraw.

Soon she could recognize without looking the resinous breath of a cypress and the metallic shiver of a palm tree. The tangle of broom, laurel, rosemary, lavender, and the nameless mass on which white, pink, mauve, and yellow flowers fed like butterflies, the famous *maquis* had a speech of its own. Unobtrusive, it was full of allusions pleasant to the nose and the heart.

She would scramble into the brush, sit or lie down in the shade, and feel no different from the plants. When in a lazy moment she touched her cheeks with an arm, a smell enveloped her. It was like amber, bread, and yes, a moist violet; it was herself. She lay still, gazing through sun-

glasses at the sky, and there, amid the quick French clouds, a sentimental English film reeled on and on:

On one of her inspection tours of the empty apartments Scottie stops in the Blue Room and her small daughter picks up an enormous sponge from a wastepaper basket. Scottie lets her keep it, since it was Master David's when he was a baby.

Each time Agnes sees him in the later years, an ever taller, ever moodier passer-by on the lawns of Trusfield Park, she thinks, "I'm using his sponge," and the thought tickles her not any less than the sponge itself. When, because of his younger son's advanced ideas, her banishment from the village is pronounced by the Squire, she feels like throwing the sponge in David's face, crying, "There! Take it back, and leave me alone!"

Again time passes. On a March afternoon in Oxford the poky nosy giantess, the gym mistress at St. Peter's Hall, bangs on Agnes' door. "A fellow in the Head's parlor to see you, ducks. Looks awfully uppish." Agnes is just back from a ramble in the Meadows, and perfectly happy. She stands, pleasantly tired, in front of a shallow little wardrobe, taking off her wet things. What with fourteen pounds six shillings in savings certificates toward a new coat, and the blue-eyed divinity student running into her on every path, she is not interested in any change of fate.

The "uppish fellow" proves to be David, and Agnes' prestige among the girls rockets sky-high. She is pleased when he takes her out to see

Charley's Aunt, and to dinner at The Mitre. He fathers her, fussing over what she eats and what she wants. She feels embarrassed: he is not only the Squire's son, he is an officer on leave, a man almost ten years older than she. Tall, dark, with a bony straight nose, he keeps furling and unfurling two vertical lines on his receding forehead. His mouth is small, and so are his teeth, but his strong neck makes one think of nakedness. Narrowing his brown eyes as he explains Russian tactics in Stalingrad to her, she watches the strong neck and blushes: can it be the same flesh that was washed long ago with her sponge?

Hours are passing in a daze. The day before his departure is a luxurious spring day, Sunday. They take a bus to Dorchester on Thames. There they sit on a log near the river dam, and David talks of the mess the world is in. A little steamer splashes busily downstream, a kingfisher shoots out of last year's bulrushes, daisies, and aconites are piercing through the grass, people in festive clothes trickle through the fields to where the Abbey bell is tolling for evensong. Although, coming from the Bentley aerodrome, learners drone in the blue air, war seems unreal and David's words an obsession. As he speaks, she watches a vein in his throat appear, then disappear, she listens to his foot tapping a nervous rhythm and thinks: "What on earth did he come to Oxford for? I know I'm pretty. But this surely is not reason enough for him." In his great effort at capturing her attention, he leans forward, staring forcibly into her eyes. Deli-

ciously uneasy, she can only stammer "Sounds wonderful . . . but . . ." He is all ears. "But what? Well, say! Say what *you* think." She makes a vague gesture as if to embrace the weeping willow dripping its tresses in the Thames, the still-naked oak on the further bank, the limpid afternoon. ". . . But what has socialism to do with all this?" Following her gaze, he looks around. "Which *this*?" "Well . . . the real world." She blushes. "I mean . . . I mean words do spoil a lot, don't you think?" Scarcely has she said it when she realizes how disappointed he is. Disappointing people has never been an agony to her before; now her heart beats faster and faster as she casts a furtive glance—the last she thinks—at the beauty that from now on, perhaps, will be forbidden to her.

In heavy silence they plod back through steaming meadows to the village and St. George's Inn where early dinner was ordered for them. A sickly-looking waiter ushers them sulkily through an ancient barn turned dining hall, to a corner near an open fire. On two sides of a small table they sit down face to face, and the waiter pushes their chairs forward as if by making their feet join he wanted to lock them in a trap. The innkeeper brings the wine list, and while David considers the drinks, Agnes feels a slow shiver creep up her legs, then pierce her womb. She sits erect absorbing the shock with avidity, the first real gift of David to her.

They drink so much, she will never afterwards remember what was said that evening. She avoids his eyes; stealthily she looks at the rays of the

setting sun fighting at first, then melting with the reflection of the flames on the silver and glass. It surprises her to find that the whole, of which she was a part a while before, does not belong to her any longer. She contemplates *it* from the outside, but even in doing so she fears she is trespassing on some new rule. This sense of guilt makes her submit to what David orders after dinner: the climbing of stairs, lying down on a bed, being hurt and made happy in a savage way.

The next day he comes to take leave. His lips are set, his gaze is absent; she knows that he is even more of a stranger than he was last night. A tremendous cold spreads inside her as she watches him walk to the door. On the doorstep he turns round and in what she believes is a slightly quavering voice, says: "Good-bye, Agnes . . . I'll write."

Indeed, letters do arrive in due course. They arrive at long, irregular intervals. They are short, dry, carrying enigmatic field-post signs. After some time she stops reading them. But she opens the envelopes, touches the paper, and examines the handwriting, because besides resentment, they exude something else too. A prayer? A hope?

Next February David makes his second appearance in Oxford. This time he takes her to Reading and marries her, by special license. The witnesses are a clerk at the mayor's office and a hotel acquaintance. War stands in good stead of family. To be able to talk sense to people, Agnes has to remind herself of her "fantastic luck!"

Their first night as husband and wife is spent

at the very heart of wartime blackout. They lie down side by side, as in an air-raid shelter, tense, rigid, two fortuitous companions waiting for day to come and set them free. At last dawn breaks, and Agnes slips out of the bed to the bathroom. In her case, on top of the bridal underwear, sits "Master David's sponge." She clasps it to her. The door creaks. . . . In his regulation pajamas David stands shivering in the sulky morning that sifts down from the skylight. She cannot bear the sadness of it all, and weeps. Then, very timid, very gentle, an arm goes around her shoulders, and—yet unknown to her—a man's voice of love mutters: "Darling . . . don't leave me. I need you very much." Warmth as comfortable as her mother's embrace and the silly joy of a new day fill her. "Look!" she says. "This is your sponge, David. I have always loved it." "My sponge?" He sniffs at the object, squeezes it. A faint remembrance becomes an image as he says: "It smells of the Blue Room. That's where my mother put me when I had measles. I was not allowed to have baths, so she tried to wash me all over with eau de cologne. I remember it hurt. Can this be the same old thing?" Shy, innocent boyishness lights his face. As he looks up, his gaze comes from a great depth.

Now the morning blossoms into triumph. The indecency of a loveless night is forgotten. Throwing her arms around his neck, Agnes jubilates: "I've always loved you, always!" They strip. They stand naked in the cold. She turns the taps on, steam envelops them, they shriek for joy . . .

Here the film usually dissolved into a luminous trail over the treetops. Agnes put down the sunglasses, turned round and proceeded with tanning her back.

Cooking big meals on the alcohol stove was a complicated affair, and the Monroes ate out most of the time. Neither did Pat occupy much of Agnes' leisure. Since David wanted a daughter able to fend for herself and get on with strangers, this seemed only fair. The child's cough was going, her French improving. If late for school, she would cross herself and mumble "*Bienheureuse Marie toujours Vierge*, stop that church clock, please!" She dropped casually such words as *le très Saint Sacrement* or *l'Immaculée Conception*; her cheeks were pink.

Left to her own devices, when not idling in the sun, Agnes was legging it across country. It fascinated her. Living here felt like floating on a lazy wave in a dimension hitherto unknown. Sometimes, before sunset, the sky on the sunny side between the gulf of St. Raphael and the hills would display almost vertical streaks of blue and pink while the mountains turned solid gold, and the vine leaves became transparent. Hills, creeks, coves, here a palm, there a pine, some flashing windows, a donkey, a goat, appeared, vanished, reappeared again in the fluctuating light. They were effects produced by a giant artist, something to dwarf all past splendor. But instead of feeling intimidated, Agnes was becoming bold. Like actors on a stage, to her natives seemed to hold no threat. Without making friends, she wanted to watch them perform, admire and applaud their play.

The land abounded in empty shells. She particularly liked the *Trinité* farm, called so because of the ancient

chapel on its grounds. The shrine had been abandoned to weeds and lizards long ago, but at the foot of the hill which supported it, trees perhaps older than Christianity sheltered a meeting place of lovers whose only Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Ghost, three persons in one, was their love. You entered the grounds through a stone gate robbed of its railings. Very tall cypresses flanked it on both sides. The garden was a wilderness kept sweet with amethyst roses. The gold-tinted *mas* offered olive-green shutters and two front doors; one, beautifully carved, to the *côté propriétaire*; the other, shabby, the *côté fermier*. A mystic pair in sumptuous robes presided over the shed. Fowl houses, sties, granaries, and stables stood, doors ajar, in the barnyard, exuding nothingness. The railings of another gate were whole but not chained together; a jade-colored majolica roof topped a cylinder-shaped well, plastered pink. Beside it a little man in rags minded a donkey.

Agnes' French did not offend him. He spoke. It sounded as if he owed her an explanation. Yes, the place had a proprietor, a rich perfume manufacturer in Grasse. When visiting at *La Trinité* his parents had used to climb the hill on foot or in a two-wheeled cart. But the limousine of their heir would not take kindly to steep narrow lanes. He never came now. It was not worth his while to cultivate the vineyards; it was not even worth his while to farm the property out. He had locked the house for its furniture to mature into antiques. He was waiting for the land to go up in price, then he would sell it to Americans, if not King Farouk. The little man wiped his nose on his sleeve. He sized Agnes up haughtily; a prospective buyer she certainly did not look to be.

The village people soon got used to the sight of her.

Word had got around of her husband's connections with the Domaine. Camping arrangements were ascribed to the family's social and financial comedown, which the fact of Pat's attending the village school corroborated. Such sedate citizens as remembered the fastidiousness of the old Countess savored the milk of vengeance. But some of the young, the maladjusted, and the disreputable felt kindly toward the redhead in shorts, no make-up, and a cool foreign face.

Ernestine, a former parlormaid for Mme. Abel Gance had tasted of the good life. The star of the Gances had faded from the local sky. They had sold their villa and departed to other shores, leaving her a "widow" in spite of her cobbler husband. She accosted Agnes in the market place. In one of those tall stony houses that form the walls of man-made canyons in the villages of Provence, she showed her into a sepulchral room where toys sent by the Gances to Ernestine's children lived in state. A rickety table served as pedestal to a rocking horse with a rainbow tail. Enormous dolls, some embodying precocious sex appeal, some a fat infant's candor, sat bolt upright on a garden settee; sailing boats heading for some unearthly regatta were anchored at a wrought-iron chair, while cars, engines, and electric trains were piled high on a wardrobe. "Aren't the children allowed to play with the toys?" Agnes asked.

Wan and soft, an elegy incarnate, Ernestine wagged her head. "*Mais non, Madame.* Those are not for our children. They would ruin them the instant they touched them." She smiled a distant smile. "Life is not what we are living here, Madame."

A sturdy man unbent as Agnes passed him by on the road. Leaning on his spade he was moved to touch his

grubby beret, wishing her a *bonjour*, which sounded worse than her own French. He was Italian. Happy for an occasion to idle a moment away, he poured out his life story. Forty-eight years old, he had spent thirty-two years digging trenches in the *Alpes Maritimes*. On his wages it was fortunate that he could not afford drink; he had heart trouble, the third attack might kill him. His wife had left him twenty years ago. With a young family on his hands he had written to Italy for his father and stepmother to come and help him bring up the children. Now the daughters were safely married off to decent Frenchmen in Normandy, far away from the Riviera rot. To comfort him in his lonely life—the parents had since died—he acquired a hobby: the slaughtering of pigs. His toothless face lit up as he explained his techniques to Agnes. He first hung them, then thrust a knife into their hearts. His last piece weighed 280 kilos. Nobody had taught him, he was born with the talent. Professionals envied him, and all the farms in the neighborhood were his customers. He chuckled; at old Varioli's he had to operate in secret because of Mme. Titine. Although a restaurateur's daughter, any beast she had known personally was taboo. She was still to be seen weeping over her *côtelette du porc*.

Both Jacques, the idiot, and Marc, the beau of the village, smiled at Agnes as they ran into her at the tobacconist's. Cracking jokes at the idiot, the beau once casually offered to carry her bag. Jacques was the son of an alcoholic market gardener who hated him for inheriting his father's love of drink, but not his stamina. During the summer months the boy worked leisurely up in the mountain resorts where labor was at a premium, and he descended on the village in autumn with sometimes as much as fifty thousand

francs to spend, which he did in a few days' time. "What does he buy?" Agnes wondered.

"Oh, but he is *the* perfect idiot, Madame!" The beau relished the phrase. "The other day they sent him down here from the hotel to see the plumber about some repairs, and do you know what he did? He bought himself a scarf. He went to Cannes for a chic, natural-silk scarf which cost him the eyes of his head! A lady's scarf. You think it was for his girl friend? Well, no! It was for himself. He wears it. He hired a taxi to take him to Cannes and back, too. And in October he will return to his cave, with not a rag to his back. You do not believe? Well, yes! In winter he lives in a cave right down the cliff. *Il y fait pipi et caca*. He is not an idiot, really, *c'est un illuminé*."

With great swagger Marc handed back the basket to Agnes, for his own girl friend burst into the *Place de la République* on a roaring motorcycle. "See you soon, Madame! My compliments to Monsieur."

At the *lavoir*, as Mme. Titine in her black shawl and big Provençal hat chatted with her cronies, she would often turn after Agnes and call, "Good morning, Madame! How is camping up there?" Then she would leave her cronies as abruptly as she had inched herself into the group. Trotting alongside the young English lady, she craned her neck to search for something in her face. The something was perhaps an answer to the question the woman who did Agnes' laundry at the *lavoir* was asking as she picked, piece by piece, the flimsy lingerie from the basket, and raised it high against the sun for everyone to gape at: "If the English pair can afford such stuff, why for Heaven's sake, do they live like gypsies on the *Côte d'Azur*?" Agnes was shy in speaking to Pierre's mother, and so they proceeded,

locked in silence, smiling foolishly. One day Mme. Cotton asked them both in for a cup of coffee. Her house was a lean-to in a big structure whose façade with no porch or ornament of any kind repelled the eye, but whose back overhanging a precipice blossomed into a graceful terrace with Louis XV adornments in stucco and stone. Mme. Cotton offered apologies for the modesty of her interior which was charming; her clay sofas (the kind that are heated from the inside in cold weather) were covered in Moroccan rugs, and the walnut dressers were gray with age. She served coffee in chipped Sèvres of a heavenly blue. She whispered dramatically to Titine: "You have seen? The door is open. . . . I am airing and dusting *la Maison* for him." *La Maison* was the big structure, and it, too, belonged to Mme. Cotton. He was her estranged husband who lived with a maid-servant on a farm. For ten years now the Cottons were at law suing each other for various monies and properties, and *la Maison* had been closed for as long. Yet each time Monsieur Cotton was expected to come and heap more abuse on his wife, she anointed with olive-and-clove essence the old world *bahuts*, the monumental wardrobes with rustic bouquets painted on their doors; she took down the sheaths from the satin *canapés* and polished the brass, in the undying hope of a reconciliation.

Mme. Titine condoled, and shared the hope. Mme. Cotton's was the superior sphere of gentlemen-farmers, officers in the army and the administration, but her wedding banquet had come from the restaurant of Titine's father, and no one who partook of it had yet forgotten its choice and multiple flavors.

In the evening children splashed at the fountain and played games in the *Place Neuve*, a triangular little plat-

form set on a rock at the far end of the village. They shrieked:

*"S'il vient des riches,
Foutez leur une paire de gifles,
S'il vient des pauvres,
Donnez leur des sous"*

as they pushed, shoved, and jumped around the "chocolate bar," a blindfolded little urchin. Arching their backs, ghost-like cats stalked gingerly under the walls while the going sun coated everything with brown-sugar icing. In the iron cage where the bell lived on the church tower, two clocks facing south and north proclaimed twice, at a second's interval, the same melancholy hour. Yet Agnes felt none of the dilating of the heart which under similar circumstances she would experience at home. Those here were people, children, and hours to be enjoyed, not loved. Oh, why was David not enjoying them with her? Occasionally her conscience bothered her: Try and join him in his wanderings. . . . But after leading her to so many dead ends in the past, duty found Agnes reluctant in the Southern sloth.

One afternoon she thought David miles away, when she ran into him on a slippery path down the hill from where they camped. There was a distressed look about him. He seized her by the arm, she fell, and he on top of her. Breathing heavily, he hugged and crushed her. But there were no words, and like an assaulted snail her body went rigid. He rolled off her with a suppressed moan. Her eyes on the sky, she kept still, but he got up, bristling with resentment. She waited. She waited for something extraordinary to happen; their tongues to speak a magic word, their hearts to burst, the earth to swallow them. An interminable

moment passed. At last she lifted her arms, and winding them under her neck said, "Please, Davvie, move. You're taking the sun away." Then he picked a twig and struck her across the legs. Stones streamed in his wake as he thundered down the slope.

She stretched. From staring into the sun her eyes filled with heavenly colors, while the world went black. She had no wish to do anything. Hours dragged on. She dozed off.

When she woke up, children could be seen against the sunset running along rocky terraces like survivors of a big fire. On another hill willows were warm and olives were cold. All of a sudden a wave of pink damped the flames, and the high-perched olives were swathed in rosy velvet.

"Look, Mummy! The olives are putting on their party frocks!" Pat cried as she emerged from the bracken. "What are you doing? Gosh!" She glanced at the weal across Agnes' legs. "How did you do it? Fall over that rock?" Resentfully, she touched her mother's flesh. "Come on, Mum. I'm hungry."

David was nowhere to be found, so Agnes fed Pat and put her to bed in the station wagon.

13

On his way to the motor coach, David Monroe took a short cut through the hills. Almost opaque, golden light filled the valley with a life of its own, as distinct from anything human as the sky is from the earth. He frowned. He hated

the elation of his senses at the contact of the immaterial substance which floated in the air, rolled down the hills, stretched out over the roofs, and crept under the trees, chasing shadows away.

It was more than light; it was a presence. Made of a thousand smells, its smell was full of obscure suggestions; forever melting into radiance, its existence offended David's intellectual detachment from nature. It offended and it fascinated him; artists idolized it, and Agnes preferred it to his love-making.

He felt miserable. He now examined his motives for choosing this spot for a French vacation, and he could see what thin pretenses Pat's bronchitis and Pat's education were. He had simply come here to take leave of his romantic past.

The other reason was a mysterious little phrase he had overheard Pierre murmur into Mauricette's ear when those two were making love in front of him: "*Joue, joue, ma mignonne.*" Feverish and exhausted, it was supposed that he could not hear or see what was going on around him. But he did see Mauricette's body relax in response to the words and sway like a gentle wave carrying her lover away into a wordless ecstasy. If David expected anything from the climate, it was this kind of inspiration; some incantation which would cause his wife's body to open its depth to him.

Walking over the crest of the hill, he saw a farmhouse down below, next to the Roman springs. Bright with geraniums and the azure morning-glory, it sat cozily in its dale, one of those visions a traveler in a railway carriage catches a glimpse of sometimes and wishes to God that the train would come to a standstill so that he could get off and

begin living in peace. But scarcely had he stopped for contemplation when he heard someone shout: a man furiously banged a door behind him, a woman in a polka-dot dress ran out in pursuit, her feet raised high, thudding in determined fury as they touched the ground, her arms waving incoherently, a perfect example of a person too angry for words. On a terraced vegetable plot another man, bent double, threw his hoe up into the air and let it fall heavily to the ground again and again, like a stork's beak pecking fiercely at an object mistaken for food. A rock rolled under the stranger's feet. . . . All three raised their heads and looked. Theirs was a deadly stare.

David's eyes narrowed with pain. What he had seen was the allegory of his dream destroyed. The three might have been Pierre and Mauricette and old Varioli; their comradeship for him was dead. And the southern wind refused to whisper "*Joue, joue ma mignonne*" into Agnes' ear. Under the blazing sun it was difficult to draw so much as a line between black and white; how was he to know who was right and who was wrong? The murderer and the victim, the coward and the hero, the fool and the sage, seemed one in a human being.

He got on the motor coach and took it as far as the library of the French Institute in Nice. He could not force himself to delve into history today. In the action he was preparing to bring against ancient Rome, he sided with the slaves, but not necessarily with Christians, whom he blamed for appeasement. In going back to Spartacus he meant to straighten out the historic line twisted by Christianity, and the title of his work was to be *The Aurelian Way Reconstructed*. Now he somehow doubted if history could be straightened out, or Spartacus promoted to great leader

above the head of Christ. . . . He longed for Shakespeare, yet the Mediterranean outside licked its own shores so complacently; reading William Shakespeare would smack of British arrogance, and he asked for the lesser William instead: Blake.

As the librarian handed him the book he beamed. "Do you admire your great English Cathar?" he purred.

"Great what?"

"Haven't you heard of the old Provençal sect? Blake seems to have borrowed many of his ideas from them." Then, still purring and beaming, he put another slim volume on the desk. "These are Denis Saurat's comments on the subject."

Diffidently, David opened the book on page three.

"To find the main ideas of Blake's poems, it would be enough for a reader of Blake to look through *Medieval Manicheism* by Steven Runciman," it said. ". . . But it is just as well to have them listed here. . . .

. . . Matter is evil. . . .

. . . The material world is the work of Satan. . . ."

David leaned back. He could not agree more. The cruel, sensuous world vibrating and scintillating under a dumb, cruel sun might well be the work of Satan. But what a mess! All through his adult years hadn't he himself been preaching a materialistic doctrine? . . .

His head heavy, he left the library at five o'clock. He did not feel like rejoining the family. Tired with the heat of the day, Agnes and Pat would now be chatting drowsily,

spreading a tablecloth on the grass behind the car, preparing tea. He could not face it.

He bought himself a fare on the bus going in the opposite direction: to Cimiez. Not far from the terminus he got off where subtropical parks surrounded villas built at the time when the shores of *la Baie des Anges* were first baptized *La Promenade des Anglais*. Fanned by palm leaves, one street still bore the name of the Prince of Wales. Meant to accommodate foreign royal courts in a bourgeois Europe, pseudoclassical, Moresque, and pagoda-like palaces displayed oblivion and decay. Cut in white marble, Queen Victoria sat enthroned in a square alive with old-fashioned verbenas. On top of a hill in the background, a colossal hotel offered to the eye almost as many wounds and gaps as a bombed cathedral.

He drifted into the hall. It was big and resonant like a railway station. All the styles of the white man's conquest seemed to meet here in a stucco apotheosis. But the building was not a hotel any more; it was an apartment house. He stood and watched busy professionals back from their offices in town ascend to their private bird's-eye view of Nice in lifts as outsized and erratic as *ballons captifs*. An air of catastrophe hung over the Gargantuan habitation.

By contrast, when David left the building he found that preparations for a public feast were being carried out in the streets. British flags were hung on lampposts and huge sheets of bunting fastened on the cypresses; a heraldic backdrop for the marble Victoria, to whom two marble girls and a marble child offered flowers and fruits of the Maritime Alps. *Dieu et mon droit*, said the English lions holding the shields. What God? Whose right? David brooded. The Calais-Dover underground tunnel of Napoleon Bonaparte

never came true, and how can an Anglo-German God give a marble matron the right to sit enthroned on the *Côte d'Azur*? Paid overtime by the municipality, French workers climbed posts and hung decorations to glorify the *Entente Cordiale*, yet the feast seemed as obsolete as *Domaine Monroe*.

He turned into a side avenue. A *concierge* in her black shawl shifted an ironic gaze from Victoria's coif to his bare calves. "Just look at him parading his ugly flesh in a *quartier chic* where decent people live. This isn't the beach, is it? Oh, well . . . he can't afford a pair of trousers on top of his Riviera trip. But then what can you expect from the trade-union rabble that rules England now? Neither manners, nor money . . ."—she hissed at her husband.

Frowning down at his shorts, David quickened his pace. Damn the French bitch! he thought, then reproved himself: where's my internationalism? Ah, but where's the solidarity of the international proletariat? The heraldic lions mocked him.

The sun was declining as he reached the gladiators' arena. Huge and shabby eucalyptuses screened the amphitheater off from the street. At the time when the *Via Aurelia* was built, athletic games were played here for the entertainment of Roman dignitaries. He sat down on a stone bench and looked in awe at the ancient walls mellowing into immaterial shapes until they became clouds in a low-ceilinged sky. Thick-boned and fleshy, a woman in black stockings and a mass of flounces sat opposite him, staring into space. Her muscles, which had probably worked hard through a life of sexual contortions, were now relaxed. Poised at an abrupt angle over a red fringe and the un-

seeing eyes of a ghost, her straw hat suited her well: a Gallic whore sporting a Toulouse-Lautrec costume.

On a lower bench, a thin little man in a shantung suit, his eyes avidly exploring the road where girls flew into adventure on their bicycles, nervously prodded his patent leather shoes with an ebony stick.

The pair were as monumental in their loneliness as was the marble Victoria, and David with a shudder hurried out of the enclosure, and into the sunset.

Purple and translucent Alpine hills closed the street at both ends; on both sides olive orchards concealed country houses. The sea remained invisible, the breeze carried its salty taste. Agaves of monstrous dimensions aimed their enormous phalluses at something—a woman?—air-borne. Rambling roses embraced shaggy palm trees. Walking up from a Roman arena to a Catholic monastery felt like crossing a panopticon of obscenities.

Then the multicolored façade of the Franciscan Convent church rose on a promontory before him; with considerable relief he entered through the atrium the twilight of a Christian age long past.

After the glow outside, at first he saw nothing but the glimmering altar at the bottom of the nave. Then colors and shapes began slowly to emerge from the gloom, bronze and pink hues gathered round a golden center, the pulpit, and a baroque Madonna came to life in a niche over the altar. Unlike the Matisse chapel where Christianity kept silent about dogma, and death was dissolved in light, here mysticism reigned under the murky vaults.

In a side aisle David halted before a large fifteenth-century retablo by Bréa, a local man. The family and friends of the Crucified formed a group around the body

descended from the Cross. An old patriarch wept. Enclosed in a landscape as luscious as the one outside, the sorrowful Mother, the adoring women, the youthful disciple, and the apostle in his prime, all the saints, seemed to lament the flesh of Christ growing cold at their feet not any more than the foolish world which had extinguished its light.

At Vence, Matisse filled his chapel with the radiance of Resurrection, at Cimiez the Lenten gloom still prevailed. But both there and here shone truths out of this world: love for the Crucified, and love for a life that lasts longer than flesh.

David looked down on the silk and lace of the altar where, mixed with bluish-green leaves, the purple and mauve flowers in a vase were the same shade as the robes of St. Magdalene in the picture. It gave him unexpected pleasure to see that even now some hands were picking mallows and lavender in the fields, to put them on the altar of Jesus Christ.

The light coming from the wide open door had changed; the church was now luminously blue. The Madonna wrapped herself in turquoise veils; on the walls and pillars blue patches were shimmering. As he crossed to the other side of the nave, David was tempted to kneel down before the tabernacle; it was as if weighed down by some excessive burden, his body were longing for the earth.

The other aisle was even more somber. Only next to the sanctuary a large cage in bronze, ebony, and glass shone dimly in a chapel. As his eyes were getting used to the darkness, a shadow inside the cage seemed to struggle to reveal itself; now a ring sparkled, now the vague outline of a head and an arm loomed in the dusk. Soon he could see that the prisoner was a girl. Wearing a wreath of im-

mortals as tall as the tiara of an Egyptian princess, a childish figure reclined on the darkness, like Madame Récamier on her sofa. The scepter in her hand was a martyr's palm. Her flesh was black with age. There was no softness in it, no color; just the endless beauty of a challenge to death. Under the cage a plaque in French read: "*Sainte Victoire*, a Roman girl. Christian martyr, IV century after Christ."

David did not know when he went down on his knees. Here was his daughter's cage of love. Here was the immortal child. A child as odd and fragile as Pat now was. A child who chose for herself things unseen, voices unheard, a victory that transcended flesh without hating it. "*Sainte Victoire*, help me!" he cried. Abruptly he stood up and rushed from the church.

A Greek colony, a Roman city, a meeting place of apostles, a Victorian dream, the haunt of American tourists, Cimiez in the evening looked pale and sweet; faintness after love.

David walked slowly by the agaves. Their flowers looked now like enormous candles with pink flames. The material world is bigger than materialism, he thought. He hailed a taxi to take him back to the camp before night fell.

14

Once more the Abbey was changing; it was now a storehouse with trunks obstructing every passage. Cynthia relished the confusion. She stuck labels on the wrong luggage;

gave things away and asked for them the next minute; she made light of priceless objects, raised hell in search of some twopenny box, and organized lavish parties among the open crates. In the evening, since her presence was required at the camp, Agnes was unable to enjoy Cynthia's impromptu dinners; but in daytime she dropped in at the Abbey with considerable pleasure. In the village, after the first impact of strangeness had worn off, the aggressive cries of the children confused her, the old women saddened her, the meek, sly, hungry dogs angered her. Ernestine embarrassed her, the erotic cats shamed her, and the idiot in the Balenciaga scarf unnerved her.

At the Abbey, except for Pat and Paul, both well-fed and happy, there were no children, the dog and cat lived in a somnambulistic friendship, the noises of the hard life did not soar so high from down below, nor was its dramatic coloring visible from so far. As seen from here, fields looked like golf links, vineyards like Persian rungs. Olive leaves glistened, syringas made your heart melt on your tongue. At the swimming pool one could always run into amusing people; a Miss Brown, a brisk elderly spinster; someone or other from the *château* across the road; someone's ambassador-uncle on a spree from Paris, some actors. . . .

They all had, doubtlessly, their worries, but as Martin in his dazzling white appeared on the lawn announcing, "We are open, ladies and gentlemen," which meant that the hour of drinks had struck at his private bar, the sun and the gaiety of the world seemed to focus on a knot of carefree persons. Those who had been fooling around in the pool leaped out of it. Their wet bodies glistening, they raced each other up to the table under a fig tree where the bottles were arrayed for them, and her rheumatic legs suddenly

agile, Miss Brown never failed to win the race. Sporting an enormous raffia hat over a shaggy breast, a famous London comedian rushed forward on a scooter; while sucking in his stomach, patting his scanty hair into place, Ambassador X took charge of the mixing.

The *château* people, a Polish pianist, his wife, and their house guests were, perhaps, the least eager. A tall lanky fellow with a big head of hair and a face that changed according to light from a smooth angel's mask to a hollow skull, the pianist rented the *château* between two strenuous tours, for a summer entirely devoted to the building up of a new program. The noises he untiringly made the locals thought a nuisance, but Martin would often stop in the middle of the road to listen to those obsessional repeats of a single phrase in its infinite variety of coloring, and say, "What a man! Think of the money he makes being patient."

To tear the virtuoso away from his two Steinways was difficult enough, but to get his wife's permission to waste time on social nonsense was even less easy. Dark, Goyaesque, an Argentinian violinist of repute, she had decided only recently to sacrifice her career to the need of reducing the volume of sound and the discord of interest in their home. She now drove her husband to success with a vengeance; tutoring him, setting his metronome for him, controlling his agents, talking to the press. The house was run by an elusive poor relation, and the guests, this summer, were the pianist's two brothers. The older one, with a wife, flew in from London. The youngest, single, came from Warsaw. Never had Agnes seen greater disparity between men. A former group captain in the Air Force and now a host in a Mayfair Club, the London Pole was a model of the genteel European. Of medium height, with straight nose, sleek

hair; conventional with a flourish, dull with sparks of morbid intelligence, polite to excess, stiff but charming, dressed with that meticulous attention to propriety which makes any occasion a solemnity; he reeked of exile.

The youngest was fair, snub-nosed, arrogantly shabby. He professed journalism, worked for a communist paper at home. Unlike his polyglot brothers, he spoke nothing but Polish, yet you could read it in his bright small eyes that, picking here a word, there another, he busily followed the conversation, patching it up into a story if not entirely fantastic, at least completely his own. As he addressed him in their tongue, the pianist seemed to be talking to a sick child whom one has not the heart to rebuke for its naughtiness. The captain, on the other hand, assumed an air of elaborate detachment each time the journalist grinned at him.

As she sat, pretty in a deck chair, the captain's wife, a shy, eloquent-eyed woman in her late thirties, one could see at once that her loyalty was with her husband, and her sentiment with the Warsaw arrival. It took her ten years of postwar uncertainties to join her husband in exile. What she saw in the fabulous West she did not like; pride and weariness seemed to hold together her split personality. Suspicious of the Eastern character, the Argentinian girl surveyed her somberly, stealing a glance now and again at her husband to make sure that his cosmopolitanism still stood.

After the family had punctiliously shaken hands with everybody and turned their backs on the Abbey, the brothers, leaving the women out, would immediately cluster together. Agnes would hear them chatter excitedly in Polish as they laughed and shoved like schoolboys. "There they go

dragging up their prewar jokes"—Cynthia remarked. The comedian looked sad after they had left, but his wife, a tragedienne, mimicked them, quoting from Shakespeare, making Martin laugh.

The children ran up to snatch some crackers and disappeared again. Lizards writhed between stones, the cypresses that screened off the Abbey from the Domaine radiated resinous heat. In the midday hush Agnes could almost see Lady Mary emerging from behind the hedge, finding her way back from the country of the dead, feeling the warm path with a livid bare foot, while the old Countess still played patience with herself under the cedar tree.

Left on their own, Cynthia and Martin never had a dull moment. Dressed up in an elaborate concho belt and a sombrero, Martin read books aloud about Mexico for Cynthia. Also they were away a great deal, taking leave of friends and places they wished to remember. Talking to Mauricette, however, Martin tried to put her mind at ease. "On these here Mediterranean shores history has overacted itself," he would remark. "But never you mind, *chérie*. Every show comes to an end. Before they are engaged by another producer, the actors will have to jump a ditch opened by the hydrogen bomb. That's all there is to it."

Pierre did not share the Monroe enthusiasm for the new state of things. Parceling it out to fill the empty corners, he shifted the remaining furniture into new positions; he dusted and polished with redoubled zeal; he kept the garden trim. With luxury leaking out of these walls, it was like a drought setting in, leaving him high and dry in a cruel climate.

Mauricette was differently affected. As her life with the

rich was ebbing, the figure of the prostrate Englishman in the *cabanon* was again coming into its own, more real, more significant than before. Her leisures were occupied by reminiscing, sewing, and wondering about foreign things. Paul and Jacqueline were to receive Holy Communion on Whitsunday. Being first at catechism, Paul was to carry the cross in the procession. The parish priest had promised to join the after-communion gathering on the Varioli farm. This was a great honor, and Mauricette's fingers trembled as she stitched and embroidered Jacqueline's white organdy dress. Pierre took great interest in his daughter's toilette. Here was something to make up, partly at least, for their shabby wedding. But he criticized Mauricette's taste, so she hid away with her work, preferably under the olive trees near the spot which reminded her of "Smith."

The man was making himself ridiculous playing at being an outcast, so Cynthia had told her, but this only whetted Mauricette's interest. He was the one left to bear witness for her that the Resistance had existed at all. While the children were away at school, she would slip into the *cabanon* and ferret in the corners of the funny little structure, a grotto rather than a house, its green majolica roof harboring a family of owls and a Holy Virgin with unnaturally twisted limbs. For long moments she would stand gazing at the clay floor where the stranger had lain on a straw mattress, with Pierre making love to her in front of him, because "all men are brothers" and "the world will be free." She wished Smith would come and look at the place with her.

They were both betrayed, she felt, and Pierre was one of the traitors. As he watched Cynthia preen herself in her Schiaparelli dress, his eyes shone and his mouth distended

in rapture—but the sight of the cobbler's cancerous wife made him angry. Of course Mauricette did not believe in the Resistance any longer; yet she liked to know that she had dreamed that dream. Now Smith seemed not to have awakened from it at all. He slept under a tent, he sent his child to the village school; one of the English "high-life" set acted like a beggar.

Interrupting her sewing often, she turned to look at the rocky ledge where brown-coated sheep grazed among the olives. A steep path led up there, and more than once she had seen Pat emerge from the ravine with Paul on her heels. The girl puzzled her not any less than Pat's father did. You never knew whether the odd things she was doing were really bad, or if her fantastic stories were lies. Up and down the prickly paths she moved with ease on her thin legs, shy and yet so sure of herself.

Least of all did Mauricette understand Smith's wife. She apparently spoke little French, her husband took care of most of the shopping for her, and so there was practically nothing for her to do. Yet, after the first week, she stopped calling for her daughter at school. Quite as if mothers were not meant to know what lurked under the trees and on the roads, Pat, equipped with that basketful of sandwiches, seemed free to do with her days as she pleased. Women who picked herbs in the clearings, as well as the Algerians working on the highway near the camping site, said they often came across the Englishwoman in shorts wandering on her own. Some had even seen her lounging in the sun, stripped of all her clothes, looking as if she were dead or in a trance. Pierre contended that she was not sleeping in the tent with her husband, but since the child slept with her, she obviously had no lover either. In her middle thir-

ties, with milky skin (now peeling from sunburn off her slightly upturned nose), her hair was like fire. What devil possessed her if she was not possessed by a man?

One afternoon Mauricette was inside the *cabanon*, eating cherries out of her pinafore pocket, staring at something invisible on the floor, when Smith came in. As he saw her he made as if to withdraw, but controlled himself and smiled. "Hullo, Mauricette!" he said. "We seem to meet in the least likely places. I thought by now the old *cabanon* would be of no interest to anyone."

With her throat tightening, she answered, "It still is of interest . . . to me—" then, plucking up courage, "—and to your daughter, and my son. They are very fond of playing here."

"Oh, are they?" His eyebrows were raised in what looked like surprise, but could have been embarrassment. "I am glad. I am very glad," he added after a second's suspense, and smiled again.

His eyes wandered over the walls and the floor, halting at the various objects on the shelves whose humble use seemed now forgotten; a pair of rusty scissors which had served to cut his bandages . . . a tin box full of nondescript trash where Pierre's mother-of-pearl cuff links used to live. . . . One item particularly arrested his attention: a silver tray with a Picasso fruit platter on it. "We had no such things here when we were hiding in the *maquis*, had we, Mauricette?" he said. "Will not the children break the lovely plate?"

"Oh, but Mlle. Cynthia would not mind a bit!" Mauricette exclaimed, and could have bitten her tongue off. "She adores Mlle. Pat," she ended in a whisper.

Smith did not budge; he looked her straight in the

face. "Who is Mlle. Cynthia?" he asked, a little off-tune. "Is her name Monroe, like mine?"

"Yes, Monsieur . . ." Mauricette murmured. "I am sorry. We should have informed you. . . . But since you told Pierre you did not care for the rest of your family . . ."

The expression on his face remained unchanged. Quite like that girl of his—unfeeling, flashed through Mauricette's mind.

"It is all right," he said. "How is Pierre?"

Suddenly she realized how unhappy Pierre was, and how rotten was their situation. "Oh, thank you. He is rather worried," she blurted out. "Mlle. Cynthia and M. Martin will soon be gone to Mexico, and there are not many people would employ a butler with just one arm. . . . And . . . well, old Varioli would kill anybody to grab another piece of land, but help his son's happiness . . ." She shook her head with passion.

As she spoke she knew that she was sliding down into a bog. At the same time an irresistible urge to bring things to a climax egged her on. She did not want silence to return, she did not want to be left alone with her future depending on Baptiste Varioli. What money bought old Varioli's jasmine field? Where's the secret fund I left with Pierre?—These were the questions she expected to be asked, yet they were not forthcoming. By stretching her arm she could touch David Monroe, yet he was miles away. One never knows his thoughts, she fretted. Still, whatever they were, she was sure he was still a *Résistant*! Against what?

Then she heard Pierre call: "Mauricette! Mlle. Cynthia is back from Villefranchel! They want their teal!"

She collected her sewing. "They are coming, they are

coming, Monsieur!" she stuttered, quite as if talking to a prisoner at large whom the police were overtaking.

The ground shaking under his angry leaps, Pierre approached. "*Oh, là là!* What are you waiting for, Mauricette?" he yelled. "Cannot you hear me?"

He saw David, and halted. "Oh . . . *Capitaine Davide* . . . Good day." The day felt not good at all; heavy. "You came . . . You came to see?" . . .

"I came to have a look at the place where you were so kind to me."

Mauricette gave a sob, grabbed the Communion dress, and ran off.

Other voices were heard, several pairs of feet rushed down the slope. Dark against a gentian sky, Cynthia appeared from behind the cistern. The adoring satellite, Martin followed her, dragging the two children by their hands.

"We-want-a-pic-nic-in-the-grove! We-want-a-pic-nic-in the grove!" they chanted.

All of a sudden, Cynthia with her little flock behind her spread out her arms, and stopped. "Hullo, Uncle David!" she cried, her eyes bright with surprise. "Please don't be angry! Please join our picnic! Pat would be so happy, wouldn't you, honey? It's her party, you know."

The little speech caused a momentary lull soon displaced by a hubbub. Pretending to be abjectly afraid of his uncle, Martin took cover in the shrubbery. Paul scoffed, Pat detached herself from the group and clasped her father's hand.

"Please, Daddy," she said gravely and in French, "have tea with me. We shall go home together afterwards, to Mummy."

Everybody's eyes were fixed on David's mouth. He

blinked; even before he could think of an answer, his tongue brought up, "Thank you, Pat. I'd love some tea."

In an instant everything turned into gleeful bedlam. The children danced a jig, Cynthia clapped her hands, Martin, now a white heron fishing for sweetness in a dark stream, skipped awkwardly toward his uncle.

"Hullo, Uncle Davvie." They shook hands. "I'm so glad you don't mind us any longer. You look wonderfully fit, you know. Doesn't he, Cynthia?"

Pierre's face, still bearing traces of chaotic distress, was freezing into a mask. "Where does Mademoiselle want tea served?" he asked in a sharp voice. "Shall I bring down the garden chairs, or will plaids be spread on the grass?"

"Do not ask me, Pierre," Cynthia brimmed over with charm. "Ask Mlle. Pat. She is the mistress at the Abbey now."

A green stalk between her teeth, speaking in French, she turned to David. "Pat is very fond of the *cabanon* and the olive grove, you know. So I gave them to her, Uncle David. Legally and formally. The Abbey in the bargain, of course. I hope you do not mind?" She threw away the stalk, flashing at him her winning smile. "Don't make her change it into a *kholkhose* though." They burst into laughter.

Mauricette was setting crockery on trays when Pierre stormed into the scullery. "What were you talking to Smith about? I bet something that's none of his business. Don't you understand he works for the English Intelligence? Can't you see they're all trying to trick us?"

Mauricette winced. "What Intelligence? What trick? I know Smith is not a spy."

"You *know* indeed! Much you knew about him when he

rotted away in that *cabanon*, never saying a word about himself! And now look at that saucy Cynthia bitch. Didn't she tell you Smith hated them? Didn't she ask us to keep quiet about Pat gallivanting around here? Well, you should see the sweet family scene today! She gives the Abbey to Smith's brat, and lo! Smith is all smiles. It's bouquets all around. The olive grove, too, goes to the *petite diablesse*!" He threw his beret to the floor. "They're all having tea together! Father is right! It's not each other they hate, it's us!" He pounded on his chest. "They envy us our *belle France*! Give it back and forth to each other right under our own eyes!"

Leaning against the dresser, her arms crossed over her breasts, Mauricette dispassionately watched her husband.

"Smith is not a spy," she repeated. "And he does not hate anyone. He still believes in the Resistance."

"Oh, I see!" Pierre cried, beside himself. "He does not hate Cynthia any more because Pat's a minor and he can grab the Abbey for himself."

"That is a lie! He is not a crook either!"

The kettle was boiling, but they paid no heed. Pierre banged a sugar bowl on the tray. "All right, all right! He is not a spy, he is not a crook! What is he then, the precious Smith you flew on your wings to when he lay there marking time, while I was sweating and bleeding for the Resistance? Who is he?" He was making for her.

She uttered a piercing little cry, clenching her fists. "You want to know?" she asked. "Well, he's what you never were and never will be!"

Helpless fury distorted Pierre's face. "You repeat that," he said, walking up to her.

She took refuge behind the dresser. "He is not a traitor, Pierrot. . . ."

He began to stalk her around the room; at the kitchen door her apron caught, and he got hold of her. His face near hers, he breathed, "Now you repeat after me: Smith is a Judas to a friend who saved his life. He seduced his wife. He spies on him. He wants to ruin him." He forced her to her knees. "Say: Smith is a Judas. Say it, or I will kill you!"

Hurried steps were running toward the kitchen. The outer door was pushed open. Pat and Paul, their eyes sparkling, burst into the scullery. Pat halted as she saw Mauricette kneeling on the floor, Pierre shaking her by the neck. "Oh . . ." she whispered to Paul. "We'd better carry the trays ourselves. They won't even notice us. They're making love."

15

The tea party at the Abbey did not disturb Pat unduly. Grownups seldom behaved in a predictable way. Only fairy people were reliable, and a few others who acted more like fairies because nobody cared for them. So her father was nice to Cynthia and Martin whom he had once kicked out of the house? So Cynthia and Martin were so busy making a fuss over him that they forgot to kiss her good-bye? All right. It was all right with her.

Neither was she surprised at Pierre and Mauricette making love in the scullery instead of serving tea in the

olive orchard. What she really minded was Paul's disappearing even before Martin had time to open the ice-cream box.

She guessed he was up in the tree where the day before he had built a nest for the two of them. The moment her father was taken by Cynthia and Martin on a tour of the property she hurried, an ice-cream cone in her hand, to the tree. At first there was no sign of life, but soon the branches parted, and a warm drop landed on Pat's upturned face; someone spat on her.

She jumped. "You mad? Here is ice cream for you." The branches creaked. "Get out of here"—a voice hissed—"I don't want you around now you are rich." She opened her eyes wide. "Did you not always want to marry a rich wife?"

Paul moved to a lower branch. "I cannot marry anyone, silly. Do you not understand? I am too young"—he sounded important—"I wanted you to be like squinting Jeanne was. Now I shall never play at keeping house with you. Never."

She pursed her mouth: "Why will you not?"

His voice became thick: "Because one does not give notice to rich people, that is why. Look at my grandmother! She is bold. And still my grandfather cannot give her notice. It is because of the money she hides in the lofts."

She dropped the ice-cream cone and started climbing the tree. "This is stupid," she said. "I am not the squinting Jeanne, and I am not bold. Why should you want to give me notice?"

He retreated to a higher branch. "I have my own reasons. And don't you dare to climb my trees."

She redoubled her efforts. "What reasons? The trees

are mine anyway. What are you mad about? I let you beat me, do I not? And I do not yell. You gobble up the food my mummy gives me. Besides, I know how to bake potatoes. My mother says they are best in their skins . . .”

He interrupted his climbing. His face appeared in the green shade, sick it was so pale. “You are an English witch, that is what you are!” he muttered. “My grandfather never forgot what you did to César and now you are grabbing the olive grove.” He looked as if he wanted to kick her, but he started to cry instead.

“Let’s play at pigeons,” she suggested in a small voice, heaving herself to the branch above. There was plenty of room “upstairs” and since playing at pigeons meant kissing, she leaned over and kissed the curly hair. He tossed his head back; tears hot on his cheeks, he buried it in her lap. “See what you have done,” he sobbed. “He is starving César to make a good dog of him again.” He bit his lips, but all he could produce was more sobs. “Grandfather is sure to chase you back to your silly England. . . .” Her tartan skirt was getting wet with his weeping. “I do not want you to go away,” he stammered. “I do not. I want you to stay right here and wait till I am big. Then I can marry you.”

Far down under their dangling feet, a lavender field stretched wide and long into the sunset. It rustled as someone waded through it. Hugging each other tight, they watched Pierre Varioli approach. He headed for the spot where the tea things still waited to be collected. He seemed vexed. The clatter of the cups as he threw them into the basket sounded angry; he was perhaps breaking them. Suddenly he stopped and glanced furtively around. Leaving the saucers behind, he stole up to the *cabanon* and stared at the *Sainte Vierge* in her niche. Was he about to

break her like one of Cynthia's cups? Pat rather guessed that he was praying.

Her father's voice called: "Pat, where are you? We're going home." Pierre Varioli started. His face screwed up in a nasty grimace, he shook a fist at the voice. Pat became frightened. She waited till he picked up the basket and faded out of sight, then she slid down the tree. "Do not worry," she addressed herself to where Paul remained invisible. "I must go now, but I am not going to England, no. Tell your grandfather he can have the olives. And, oh! Tell your father it is not my father's fault I am an heiress. Bye-bye!"

She ran off.

On their way back to the camp, at first Pat and her father left all the talking to the frogs. A choir up at the Abbey was juicily croaking, "Green man, good man," while another, at the Roman springs below, responded in a screechy monotone, "Old man, bad man." The lascivious smell of jasmine overpowered the chaste lavender in the air, and David was in a hurry to join Agnes.

Leading the way, his daughter skipped in front of him on her skinny legs. He felt amused: the Fairy Queen did not do badly by herself. He called, "Don't run away, pup. I want to talk to you." She stopped and waited for him. "Now, why wasn't I told that the fabulous Americans were Cynthia and Martin? I gather you've been seeing a lot of them."

She frowned. "And who told you today, Daddy? Was it Mme. Mauricette? She shouldn't have done it, you know. A secret is a secret."

"Aren't you supposed to tell me your secrets?"

She shrugged. "You don't tell me where you go, do you? Well, I don't mind. You can have your own France, Daddy."

He swallowed, then remarked meekly, "I don't want to pry into your secrets, Pat, but I might just as well tell you that from now on I propose to inform you and Mum where I go."

She gave a half-hearted skip. "Oh, do you?"

He would not be discouraged. "What about Mum?" He found Pat's hand. "D'you think she enjoys *her* France?"

The child blinked busily. "Oh, Mum . . . Somebody's watching her. But he's a shadow . . . I think."

"What d'you mean, 'a shadow'?" He felt anxiety gripping him.

Pat was now staring at something in the sky, something perhaps that bid her stay away from big people's secrets. "Hasn't everybody got a shadow? You don't see them so much in London because of the crowd, that's all."

He smiled. "I understand *your* shadow's name is Paul."

She withdrew her hand. "Paul's not a shadow," she said. "He's a real boy. We don't play at goblins any more. I'll marry him."

The sun was low. Each tree had its own abstract portrait, a shadow, spread out on the ground. Here's poetic justice for you, David reflected. Now that I am on my way to being converted to her elusive world, Pat's forsaking the goblins. He cleared his throat. "Well, are you pleased to become the Abbey heiress, Pat? With all these frogs and olives on your estate?"

She shook her head. "I'm not. So many olives are too much trouble, I think. Shouldn't Cynthia give them rather

to old Varioli, Dad? I'm sure he would let me and Paul play at the *cabanon*." She raised to him those pale eyes that reminded him of ether, and Ste. Victoire.

He put an arm round her shoulders. "That was a sound idea, Pat," he said. "You'd better talk it over with Cynthia."

They were halfway to the camp when Agnes rushed down to meet them. Eyes and teeth flashing, her bare legs milky against the dark juniper, she leaped from rock to rock waving her arms in gay agitation. "Hullo, vagabonds! How did you find each other? Step on it now! Supper's ready." She looked exuberantly happy, and the shadow that skipped along with her was as playful as she. David felt immense relief.

The night after his visit to Cimiez, he had told her, "Don't leave me. I know I've been behaving atrociously. But I need you, I need you more than ever. Does it still mean anything to you? Can you forgive . . . ?"

She had wept. "I waited for so long." She had laughed. "Remember Reading? The sponge? I've been waiting all these years for you to say it again."

As dawn was breaking he had seen her head, bits of grass caught in the hair, submerging the darkness, face upward, the face of a Flore. "How come you are so changed, David?" she had wondered.

"Last night I prayed," he had replied.

Since then each time he came back to the camp after a few hours absence, he feared he might find the new gladness gone.

"Mummy!" Pat cried. "Did Cynthia tell you? I'm an heiress. I don't like it though because Paul's people are cross." The kettle was whistling, and busy with brewing the tea, Agnes did not hear. Pat stopped on the crest of the

hill. Looking pensive, she contemplated the valley below with all its olives, its vineyards, its houses and secrets. Suddenly her face lit up. "Daddy, look!" she gasped. "The fireflies!"

A swarm of fireflies was, indeed, throbbing over the *maquis*. He squatted beside her so as to see exactly what she saw, and she turned on him eyes wild with rapture. "They are early this year," she whispered. "They are like sparks. What are they *really*, Daddy? Can they be souls?"

The word "insects" tickled his tongue, but he ignored it. "Let them keep their secret, Pat," he whispered back. "All I can say is that they live a little longer than sparks, and perhaps shorter than souls."

She pressed her cheek to his. "D'you mean you like them, Daddy?"

He was absurdly moved. "Of course I do," he muttered.

She sprang up. Clapping her hands, she flew to her mother. "Mummy, Mummy!" she cried. "Daddy says he likes my France! He says fireflies live longer than sparks! Where's that supper? Daddy's awfully hungry."

16

Square-shouldered, of a medium height, but tall for Provence, Baptiste had never been a shadow to his own wife. He had married her, and escorted her to church on feast days, because she was an only daughter of a well-to-do man and niece of a maiden aunt who ran a well-stocked

store. Being her husband had at first afforded him some intimate pleasures too. He rather liked her innocently fervent eyes, ivory skin, the trim figure that looked well in a tight bodice, and felt soft in bed.

After a copious meal on a Sunday they had used to sit in the bower holding hands, breathing wine, kissing before they dropped off. Sometimes family would be invited; there would be more eating and drinking, a great deal of story-telling, and a game or two of *quadrette* at a *sou* a point.

Titine kept the bed clean with coarse linen sheets perfumed with lavender and thyme. Their nights in May had been cool as those sheets, and the nightingale trilled outside in the laurel bush.

She was twenty-two, and Pierre three, when she caught the fever, and lost her looks together with her hair. Her mood changed from gentle to melancholy; what had been healthy conjugal fare turned to bile. She was afraid of having her *perruque* upset and the bare scalp exposed; movement, company, the sun, became problems to her. She took to animals, such old people as were beyond vanity, and God.

As soon as Pierre learned how to stare attentively and ask questions, she deserted him for St. Anthony, the patron of lost things.

Baptiste could not help sleeping with farm maids. His bastards cost him even more than he cared to spend on his family, and so his grudge against women became hate.

Life was hard. Irrigation plans remained locked in the desks of bigwigs in the ministries, while Provence thirsted for a drop of rain. On the way to his parched vineyard Baptiste swore as he passed the English and American parks where, day in, day out, spraying reels turned, creating

an everlasting spring on the Riviera. The foreign parasites were taking ten times more out of the land, it seemed to him, than they spent in shops and restaurants.

Each time he read in the papers that the "great waters" in Versailles once again had played in honor of some foreign royalty or national politician, he cursed "them," the stupid and the mighty, who dug France into her Paris grave under the Arch of Triumph. He was not interested in politics; yet somebody had to be held responsible for the perfume industries being shifted, more and more, to Africa.

When he was buying the jasmine field with the money his son had provided from a shady source, the Grasse manufacturers still signed contracts with farmers for a season's harvest; a year later Baptiste had to sell his crop, cheaply, by the kilogram. A playground for the not-hungry locust, old Provence chewed the shame of being forced into barrenness.

Since he refused to sell even the tiniest piece of land, he thought of renting out a rocky field as a camping site for tourists. The project proved costly. The Paris and London gypsies would not go to the village for water. He had to dig for a source, lay pipes, install a hydrant. In consequence his land tax was raised.

When David Monroe came to pitch his tent on the site, however, Baptiste was better off than most in the village, and as green as a quince in August. As green, and as bitter. What with the additional worry about the sheep missing their best season up in the hills, his wish for something unusual to happen that would clear the day for him was becoming a fixation.

June was hot and Baptiste made himself a bed in the stable where the company of a donkey importuned him less

than Titine's moist body. There he lay, sleepless, his face close to a peephole, sniffing at scents which had no practical meaning for a farmer, listening to sounds he had never taken notice of before. Often he left his lair, and roamed in the moon-soaked fields as if trailing the thief who had stolen the formula for a happy life from him.

As they sat under the trellis on the evening of their arrival, the English couple impressed him differently from what he had expected. He had planned to find them unimportant, a worthy company for Pierre and Mauricette. He had planned to watch them, and defeat them like children. He had planned to be amused, he had not planned to be confused. David Monroe still had the stubborn, hungry face of that cub, Davvie, who had pummeled his stomach with his fists. But he did not seem to recognize Baptiste, and it made Baptiste feel unimportant. Then moonlight oozed through the wisteria net, and the woman's eyes, as well as her breasts under a tight sweater, were revealed: to Baptiste they did not seem unimportant. Finally, the impudent flaxen-haired child made a fool of César. After the three of them had driven off he was left in a state of a not altogether unpleasant excitement. Something like a foretaste of big things to come.

The day after they settled on the site, he crept out of the stable at dawn. Birds were only beginning to chirrup. Lights and smells were still asleep, the sea remained invisible. Pines leaned perilously from the hill over the stony village, as if trying to peep down the chimneys into people's last dreams before awakening.

Through the woods and the clearing he stole right up to the oak at the rear of the station wagon with its GB plate. Its doors were shut, the windows open, and not a

sound was coming from the inside. At some twenty meters' distance the flap of the tent was open, too, but from there came the noise of a healthy man's snoring.

Baptiste listened for a good while, then tiptoed to where he could faintly see the motionless figure stretched out on a rubber mattress. He guffawed. Here, in an open field, the former parachutist, perhaps a spy, perhaps a politician, a man of many secrets, lay profoundly asleep. . . . How was he to achieve his aims if he wasted a dawn in a foreign country like this? Pah! the modern world. Even the English were different at the time of Charles the Second. Baptiste's grin broadened; he obviously had nothing to fear from *this* man.

Quickening the breeze, the sun was rising; something pink fluttered at the car's doorhandle. He turned back to the station wagon and squeezing in his hand a pair of nylon panties, cast a sidelong glance into the car. Two bodies in blankets, one long, one short, were resting there. A naked arm caught his attention; a woman's arm thrown back over a head which was still swathed in darkness. His eyes wandered up and down the milky way of that arm when a sheaf of light gushed from the horizon. The arm quivered; it shone. Fascinated, Baptiste watched. But gravel creaked under his foot, and his big rusty joints responded with an animal alertness. As quietly as he had emerged from it, he disappeared in the wood.

In the days that followed, as he tended his vineyards, hoed the jasmine field, and climbed ladders in the orchard, the vision of the woman's head plunged in darkness, with only the crescent of a bare arm shining above it, haunted him. He wanted a look at the woman in broad daylight.

Despite his superior face and cool manner, the English-

man—Baptiste knew it now—would not stir up trouble in the Varioli backwater, yet personal attention to him was what Varioli had promised his son. And so, climbing hills between one job and another, he hovered over the camp watching out at a fair distance for the wrong people to contact David Monroe, alias Smith.

Once he ventured near the site before sunset. This time he found himself a large hollow, concealed by rosemary and broom, at a stone's throw from the wagon. He hid there, unseen. The tent looked lifeless. Under the oak tree sat the child, an exercise book across her lap, drawing; even nearer the hollow the woman perched on a folding stool. She and the child talked, the man was obviously absent.

The first time Baptiste had seen her, night was falling, she was wearing a scarf round her head, except for the one moment under the trellis, she had had no body, nothing but a voice saying "*bonsoir*" and "*merci*" in an ugly accent. Now, something glistened in the red glow of the sun setting behind the Esterel. A hand was combing a stream of fire. The long-forgotten flame stirred in him. Incredulously he felt it flicker inside his body. He watched the comb tugging at the blazing stream, raising it like a horse's tail, parting it into skeins, and he wondered. So, that hair, the baker's wife's hair, was still alive in this world? One could grip it, and pull it, without the head suffering any damage. The woman seemed to take pleasure in her occupation; her brow and eyes hidden behind the shiny screen, the half-opened mouth smiled, the cheeks and the throat breathed coolness.

Deep contentment filled Baptiste. He felt like whistling, perhaps giving five francs to the woman. The smell of rose-

mary that tickled his nostrils was like the flavor of a spicy dish. Dusk fell. From bright gold, the hair turned to bronze. He clasped his stick. As in his young days when the world sometimes seemed too much for him, he wanted to shut his eyes and just be.

But the child leapt to her feet, and came to lean on her mother's shoulder. "Look, *Maman*"—she chattered in French—"I made your portrait. Today you are not a violet, you are a scarecrow." The woman glanced at the book and laughed. He could not follow what she said, but the girl interrupted her. "*Non, non, Maman, non!* This is our French lesson, and you must learn to speak properly. A scarecrow is *un épouvantail*. Now you say it!" Again there was laughter. Plucking at the curls over her mother's ear the girl went on: "The portrait is how you looked with that hair flapping like a red rag round your face!"

The woman got up. "Time for supper, Patsy. It is no use waiting for Dad"—she conversed in faltering French. Then "Look!" She pointed to the Esterel where, after the sun had disappeared, rubies seemed to drip from a pocket in the sky. The child gasped. "Gosh! It scares me. Everything is so grand here. Does God live nearer to France than to England?"

Baptiste moved and a bush swayed. The woman started, but the child skipped on: "*Oui, oui!* There is your shadow watching you."

"Oh yes, of course, there is my faithful shadow" the mother nodded with mock gravity. They vanished behind the station wagon.

Baptiste made for home. Noiselessly, he slid down the wild path. They call me a shadow—he brooded. A shadow

on my own grounds. A shadow . . . And what's that nonsense about God? You little Protestant bitch, you wait till I catch you playing with César again. . . .

Nights continued cloudless. Through the holes in the stable roof the June stars, high and pointed, shone without blinking. Baptiste tried to conjure up sleep by counting the olive trees he knew so well in the Abbey grove, but the Englishwoman's arm stretched out of the darkness and dispersed the trees. It wriggled like a snake, from its pit a sharp odor trickled down his throat. He ached to slip out of the stable, go and see how the Englishman was handling his marital affairs.

But even in nighttime, prudence forbade Baptiste to come close to the tent and the station wagon. Usually he stood behind the oak tree holding his breath, listening to a lonely cicada, or a bird stirring in its nest. If he heard the man snoring, he scoffed, and felt good; if there were no such noises, his heart pounded: was the man with his wife, or was he not?

Once, he perceived something like the sound of a sail catching the wind . . . David Monroe opened the tent, stepped out of it, and unbent to his full height. A moment later the woman coughed in the station wagon; they were not sleeping together.

Monroe was wearing pajamas. Against the paling sky a strand of hair stood out, like a dark feather. He pissed into a bush, then, lighting a cigarette, stalked up to a tree stump and sat down bending forward, precariously near the oak tree. It struck Baptiste that the man, instead of letting the weight of the body rest freely on his buttocks

and feet, kept the bare feet hidden in a squatting position as if they were objects of shame. Used to hunting, Varioli knew how to become deadwood to a beast; his breathing almost stopped, blood slackened in his veins. With wild boars, the trick worked only seldom, but it seemed effective with the Englishman; in the peaceful process of smoking, the cigarette flared up and subsided at regular intervals, betraying no uneasiness.

It gave Baptiste pleasure to have the camper so entirely at his mercy. He could relax and allow his thoughts to wander to the foreign island where kings had been murdered in the fog and queens beheaded by their husbands. He tried to visualize a country whose men were driven to sailing the oceans by a constant lashing of rain, and women wore trousers because of that; a country with chimneys growing taller than trees, and gold piling high on the desks of the "milords." In that country the person who now puffed at a cigarette, letting his wife stretch her arms in the void, was perhaps called a man.

Varioli imagined him on the other side of the *Pas de Calais* tramping on those shrivelled feet of his, along misty roads, in pursuits of such goals as were proved wrong by Jeanne d'Arc, the Cardinal Richelieu, and *Maréchal Pétain*. But there the vagaries of the old peasant mind stopped; the smoking figure became the boy Davvie championing a vampire; and Baptiste's fists itched to give him a cuff. Then the figure sneezed. Monroe stood up and crouched back into the tent.

On his way back Varioli thought with distaste of the child Patricia, a willful creature, with no girlish timidity, making fun of her elders. He deemed it all wrong for her

to sleep with her mother. A straw mattress under a bare sky would be good enough for her.

Weather was good, yet a storm could not be long in coming, and there were not enough hands to do all the hoeing, weeding, trimming, and spraying on the farm. Baptiste's anger with his family was always at its hottest in summer. With work left unfinished in the fields on a close evening, bad words and crockery would fly in volleys in the kitchen.

But this June was different. Unrebuked, uncorrected, Mme. Titine shed furtive tears: her husband was becoming queer. The jasmine field grew into a wilderness of leaves too big and flowers too small. Sheep returned to their high pastures, and yet not once did Baptiste visit them; two lovely ewes were lost. "He is getting old. He does not care," she cried. "Soon he will turn into a ghost, and make my nights an even greater misery."

She fingered her rosary in the stuffy kitchen, while Baptiste scoured the country, gaping and sniffing at things. For nearly seventy years he had been walking up and down these roads without seeing what glowed, murmured, and gave out smell on both sides. There had always been above his head a sky threatening drought, and under his feet an earth yielding too little, asking for too much. The girls he had pinned down in his youth seemed to rise out of his own blood rather than the nature around; they had a womb and a pair of legs, nature was not meant for pleasure.

But now, suddenly, his own field flourished into mysteries. The woman and the child stared and stared at the Esterel. Mindless of the anger, the fear, the tramps that creep silently through darkness, the Englishman puffed at

his cigarette in the open. What were they staring at in France that was hidden from Baptiste?

As he breathed his native air now, the old man remembered dimly that he, too, had once known the wish to see more than meets the eye. His heart grew heavy.

17

Communion Day was drawing close. Heedless of the teachers' scolding, girls at school chattered their heads off discussing their white dresses, guessing at presents their aunts, uncles, and innumerable cousins were bound to shower on them. Boys memorized serving at Mass. All the children, carrying rules instead of candles, rehearsed the procession, and the organist disrupted the classes with his demands on the choir.

Left out of these activities, Pat hung on to school simply because no one told her not to. And also because of Paul.

He had grown lately. He was not clowning, pinching the girls, mimicking the teachers during break. With a grim face he recited Latin prayers in a corner of the playing ground.

Lessons in catechism were given at church after school. Pat had never been to one, but children during class threw about their Old and New Testament primers, and so she picked up a few notions. It all sounded like a fairy tale, and her interest in the in-vi-sable returned. For-

tunately, she still was able to attract Paul's attention with her sandwiches; his mouth full, he would sometimes answer questions. Once she asked: "Are fairies and angels the same thing?"

He grinned: "*Quelle andouille!* Angels are holy, and fairies are not even Catholic. It is a sin to believe in them. They were chased up to the hills long, long ago. Our shepherd says he has never even seen one."

"Can you see an angel then?"

He drew himself up. "An angel is near you when you are born. And if you are good he leads your soul into Heaven when you are dead, but your body is eaten by worms."

"Oh!" She blinked. "Oh, I saw angels in the cemetery, but Daddy said they were stone."

He shrugged. "How can your father know about angels? He is a heretic."

The way he said it indicated that a heretic, like an anarchist, was a bad man, and she snapped, "He is not! He knows very well there are no fairies in France. He told me so himself." She was getting excited. "I do not like angels! They sit near the road with no dresses on and pretend they are stone. I think it is rude."

His eyes narrowed. "You are rude yourself. People say they see you in your camp with no dress on."

"Do they? I am not an angel, that is why I must wash." She was losing her way in the maze of the invisible, and tried to establish the facts. "You are sure angels never pretend they are flowers? Or people?" He sniffed contemptuously, but she became pensive. "—Fairies do, you know. . . . They raise the dough for the bakers. . . . They make clothes for the orphans out of dead leaves. . . . They build houses

for the poor . . . that is, when they play at people. When they play at flowers, they just look at you and smell nice. Do not the angels do all this?"

"Of course they do not!" He was insulted. "One does not fool around when one is holy, and mind your own business anyway, since you are going to hell."

She turned gray in the face. "Why must I go to hell? I learned Ave Maria by heart. I have not killed anybody. . . ."

He eyed her critically. "You learned Ave Maria by heart? What for? Holy Mary would never listen to you."

For the first time since they met, he saw her mouth curl into a horseshoe. Out of his pocket came a handful of cherries. He tossed them proudly in her lap. "There. Eat them! They are good. They come from our farm." She tried to swallow one, but could not. His ears blushed a fiery red. "You are a baby," he said. "Before we marry I shall have you baptized, then you will have an angel all to yourself. The same as I. Eat your cherries now."

The next day after school Paul discovered that he missed his penknife. They both ran to the *cabanon* to search for it. Rummaging through the rusty and mildewed stuff in the shelves, combing the grass outside, digging into the straw mattress they searched and searched, and the silly thing could not be found. They had great fun though, touching, sniffing, together guessing at places, cursing the thieves, getting angry and tired. They worked, they worried; it was not play, it was real.

Hot and sweaty, they at last eased themselves on to the mattress. Side by side they lay champing away at a slab of chocolate, listening to a bumblebee droning as it struck the ceiling in its crazy flight. Their hands met, they

clasped them, and he drew closer to her. "Is sin the same as being naughty?" she asked in a thin clear voice.

He started. "I don't know." Then he thought better of it. "There are all sorts of sin." His authority had to assert itself: "Some sins are less naughty and some more."

Now that he had enlightened her, he could again do what he pleased. He picked up a twig of bulrush from the floor and began to tickle her calves with it. She hissed with annoyance, but her legs opened, and the bulrush crept inside them, moving slowly up and up toward the short panties. It was unbearably pleasant. She wriggled, but her arms remained rigid and her eyes shut. She felt Paul's breath on her cheek while the tickling made her bite her tongue. Suddenly something snapped in her; she could bear no more. Not opening her eyes, she punched Paul on the breast and sprang up. He did the same. They hit at each other wildly, ineffectively, then, half-giggling, half-crying, fell on the floor again. Black horror filled the *cabanon*. They flew out of it, and stood trembling under different trees.

Time passed. Slowly the sun was finding its way back to a little girl's heart. Pat opened her eyes and swallowed; she was not frightened any more; she was ashamed, sorry. Now she knew which sin was the naughtiest: the big people called it love-making. She hated it. But she longed to grow up, to have Paul marry her and tickle her again. This was a funny way to feel, and in the days that followed, Pat wanted badly to ask some more questions.

One morning as she walked down the hill with her father, he to the market place, she to school, she stopped and not looking him in the face, muttered, "Daddy, is everything pleasant a sin?"

He smiled. "It depends on what you call pleasant,

Pat. There are people for instance who find it pleasant to make other people suffer. Well, that's sin."

She squeezed his hand compassionately; he was a sinner, he made her mother suffer. They walked in silence for a moment, then she returned to her task. "Daddy . . . are you a heretic?"

He glanced at her, disturbed. "What's the matter with you, Patsy? Is this what they teach you at school?"

They were in the market place; it was time for them to part, and she did not answer. She felt the bruise on her arm; it ached. Paul made her suffer, he was a sinner, but so was she. She had struck him, bitten him. "Bye, bye, Dad," she said in a small voice.

A few days later she woke up inside the station wagon alone. The moon was shining. No breeze. She leaned out. The night smelled dryly of hay and pines, fireflies sparkled in the air. On the log outside two people were sitting: her father and mother. His bare chest loomed in the moonlight, while her mother, wearing the white chiffon Aunt Beryl had sent her for Christmas, looked like one of the cemetery angels. They did not speak or move. With eyes half-closed they just seemed to be there and happy. They don't want me to see them now, she thought. I'd better sleep. And as she fell asleep she had a dream. She dreamt of Paul and herself holding hands under an olive tree. There were no bruises, there was no sin, just happiness.

Waking up the next morning, she felt sad. She hated Paul's hard-hitting fists, the stuffiness in the *cabanon*, the bickering, the shoving, all that flying like fireflies and burning like Jeanne d'Arc: all of her sinful life. But she loved it too.

The day turned out rotten. Children at school teased

her, the teachers fussed. Paul was summoned by *M. le Curé* to help decorate the altar, and never showed up at lunch-time. She drifted into the Abbey at noon, but Cynthia and Martin were out. The empty hall echoed her steps, crates and trunks made her eyes sore. Mme. Mauricette was not bustling around humming; she had cooking to do on the farm. And the estate was not yet ready for the English heiress (he meant Pat) to take possession, M. Pierre said with a sour face. Dragging her feet, she went home early.

After her father had had tea at the Abbey and had declared that he, too, liked fireflies, she had come to think that there was one France after all. But now again it seemed as if there were two Frances: one for the French, the other for the English. Since she was to marry Paul, which France was it going to be for her?

A surprise awaited her at the camp; facing her parents in the open air "lounge," sat Cynthia and Martin. Pat knew that the Abbey secret was no secret any longer; everybody had blurted out everything to everybody else, and they were seeing a lot of each other now. Yet, instead of making things nicer, it only spoiled them. She felt tired, unwanted. She did not wish to talk to the big people. She sneaked noiselessly behind the tent and lay down where she could not hear what they were saying.

"Why Mexico?" David asked. "In a year's time Martin's coming into Trusfield. You'll certainly want to be home by then."

Martin chuckled. "I seem to be more of a socialist than you are, Uncle David."

"Oh?"

"Well, as long as I move about, the world is my home, and Cynthia feels the same. Don't you, darling?"

She made one of her American noises. "Sure, sure! Especially as all I can do in Trusfield is make sandwiches for the trippers, while Martin trades entrance at the gate at two shillings and six pence per head. And why should we live there at all, Uncle David? Scottie and Hilary have retired to their cottage, Mother cruises on her boy friends' yachts, Grandma's got herself a flat in Mayfair, and Aunt Mary's dead. There's nothing left for us in the Hall, just Papa's portrait in red dress, thank you."

"True the Hall's not what it used to be," Agnes sighed. "But, Martin, what about your seat in the House?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Agnes. What kind of a peer do you think I'd make?"

They all laughed, each one in another mood: Martin defiantly, David ironically, Agnes half-heartedly, Cynthia triumphantly.

After a short silence enlivened by the pouring of wine, David muttered, "Oh, well . . . I suppose we all in this family are lost sheep."

"Here's to Cynthia," Martin drawled, raising a plastic mug. "She's been my shepherdess ever since nursery days. I bet I'll never look for another."

She gave him a peck on the forehead. "There's no need to be unnatural, baby. Adventure be our shepherdess! Okay? Here's to Mexico!"

The weather was turning. Haze drifted from the sea into the valley, muffling color, lending a haunting resonance to sound. Clouds climbed up and down the Alps, adding grayness to the blue and gold. Somewhere in the village a confused cockerel crowed. A hammer fell lazily, obstinately

on a rock, a sawmill wheezed, a plane buzzed, magpies screeched. As in a romantic sonnet, the lamblike moon of a summer afternoon grazed in the sky over the cypresses which breathed heat and immortality. "You don't think it's beautiful here?" Agnes remarked.

Cynthia drew in the beautiful smell. "Preposterously beautiful." She made a face. "And dead."

"What do you mean 'dead'? It's full of people."

"So what? Listen to the noises they make. . . . It's earth, earth, earth all the time. Dig it, rake it, grab it, empty your bowels into it, bury corpses in it. I'm surprised the air smells so good. . . . But do you think they believe in air? They hate birds. You know the *pâté de grives*? Delicious, isn't it? But Agnes, the way the locals trap those small hungry birds to put them into tiny cages and fatten them and make them into a pâté!"

David poured out more wine. "All right," he said. "Suppose that Europe is a peasant continent, and peasants don't like flying. I still can't see why you've picked Mexico. D'you think it's a country of aviators? There's quite a lot of drilling and cultivating going on there, I assure you. Not to mention gravedigging. . . . Ever seen those statuettes of skeletons in bridal dress?"

Martin downed his drink. "We don't mind statuettes, do we, Cynthia? What we do mind, Uncle David, is cemeteries. Europe is too much of a cemetery. Don't look horrified, Agnes! There's no escaping from graves, I grant you, but in Mexico, no one will ask foreigners to talk in whispers because we walk over skeletons. I hope."

"What about the States? Not much talking in whispers over skeletons there." David contemplated his shoes gravely, and Cynthia shook her head at him.

"Oh, no, no whispering over the red Indians, David, no," she said. "But Washington! Lincoln! The Unknown Soldier! It's not whispering, it's a deafening roar, and if you don't join in, the drum majorettes beat you with their batons till you admit to un-American activities—"

"—And," Martin popped in—"you admit to it! Because it is true! Because we don't love our plucky great auntie who braved the seas on the *Mayflower* so as to teach the savages how to serve chops with mint sauce."

Agnes banged her mug on the table. "I'll be damned if I know what you two are after! Anyway, I very much doubt that you'll endear yourselves to the Mexicans by spitting at their ancestors."

Martin put on an air of mock dignity. "Madam! Agnes! I beg to be forgiven. Yet we do not belong. And we have no wish to belong. We're waiting."

"Waiting for what? Death?"

"That remains to be seen. Preferably a flight to the moon. I must say"—he winked at Cynthia—"we are very interested in other planets. We own a telescope, if you please."

David stirred irritably. "What makes you think you have the right to remain uncommitted?"

Martin stared at an ant which, with enormous effort, was tugging away something pathetically small. "Right?" he echoed. "Have I the right? What makes you think, Uncle David, *you* have the right to camp where ants lived undisturbed? You don't consider ants because your rights are human. I don't consider humans because I rather feel for the ants."

"Well, then stay committed to the ants, damn you!"

David said loudly, and blushed; he did not want to be unkind to Pat's friends.

But Martin did not seem to mind. "That's what I'm trying to do, Uncle David!" he cried enthusiastically. "Stay committed to the unimportant." His eyes twinkled. "Perhaps one of my hobbies—painting, astronomy—will one day seem important to the man in the moon."

They sipped wine in silence for a while, then Agnes brought up thoughtfully: "Adventure is good when you're young, Cynthia. But one day youth will desert you both."

Martin instantly changed to his arrogant, nasal voice. "I wouldn't be so sure of our damnation, Agnes. Today adventure to us is Mexico. But as we grow old it may become something quite timeless—say bullfights or esoterics."

Agnes' beads tinkled as she twisted the cord, but Cynthia clapped. "Bravo, kid! Family conversation mustn't necessarily be dull. Now, Agnes, d'you remember your white bonnet? Turban-like? Very becoming it was on red hair. When? Oh, Martin's last term at Eton, I suppose it was. I chaperoned him about London on his Easter vacation, we strolled into Kensington Gardens, and you were there, Agnes, minding Pat. We hid, and watched from behind a tree. That treasure of yours sat in a pixie hat in her pram, very solemn, considering the world. We gaped and gaped, and it was like going back to our own babyhood. But Pat was so much happier, Uncle David! Her mother was with her, not the Swiss bitch who used to terrorize us each time the butler felt like making love to her. Pat looked such an honest little body, with no one's bitchiness to keep mum about. . . . We fell in love with her just there and then, didn't we, Martin? Later on, we always tried to keep track

of her. Well, I'm grateful to you, David, and you, Agnes, for not countering my little wish, this time."

David cleared his throat. "Oh, the Abbey. . . . It's for us to be grateful, Cynthia. But I hope your lawyers will run the estate till Pat's of age. I want her to decide for herself."

"Oh, but Uncle David," Martin broke in, "I can hardly see how a person can be more adult than Pat is. Well, Pat said she'll have the Abbey."

Behind the tent Pat was about to sink deeper into her snooze when Martin's voice saying her name reached her. She blinked, and sat up. The words of the big people buzzed in the distance. She suddenly remembered that she had something to tell Cynthia about the olive grove, and her sleepiness departed. As she crept quietly into the "lounge," they saw her at once and her mother exclaimed: "Pat, I didn't see you come home. Have you been here long?"

"I took a nap, Mummy. I came up by the Abbey path." She headed straight for Cynthia and settled in her lap while they all looked at her, a big question mark in their eyes. Her thoughts became confused. Yawning, she snuggled up to Cynthia. "I don't want to be an heiress, Cynthia," she declared. "Honestly, I don't."

They watched on in silence. At last her father spoke. "That's all right, Patsy. No one will force you."

But Cynthia cooed: "Darling, what's wrong? Don't you like the Abbey any more?"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," Martin moaned. "The child is a perfect woman! What made you change your mind, Patricia?"

To this, she whispered in Cynthia's ear: "I like the Abbey very much, but can I do with it what I wish?"

"Of course you can, love." Cynthia turned on the others a triumphant gaze. "She hasn't changed her mind. She only wants to make sure the Abbey is hers for keeps." Carefully she stood the heiress on her feet. "Well, that settles it. Let's be off. Martin, we're dining at the Mexican Consul's."

They left. Cynthia's red dress well ahead of Martin's blue jeans, the Wicked Ones skipped down the hill, shouting "Adiós!"

As she waved, Pat felt like crying. What she had told them was not all she wanted to say; it was indeed much, much less. Avoiding looking at her parents, she went off by herself. "Cynthia, thank you for your France," she murmured, clenching her fists to keep the tears back. "I'm going to give it to old Varioli because he wants it. And when he's happy, I can marry Paul." She stopped at a tall thin shrub which somehow reminded her of Martin. She hugged it, cautiously. "I love you, Martin," she reassured it. "I love spivs, I love Mexico, but I've got to stay here, because I love Paul best."

In the meantime Agnes and David lingered at the spot from where they still could see the red and the blue dot getting smaller on the road. Poor devils, Agnes thought, they'll never find peace. Miserable little snookers, David thought, all they meant to say was, Uncle David, you're an old fool not worth talking to!

18

With all the big packing done, the farewell parties given, there was not much work for Pierre to do at the Abbey. He had taken great care of the flower beds before, and he loved the lawns. But since the property was to go to the *petite diablesse*, he neglected the garden. By sheer force of habit he still picked up the hose now and again and turned the faucet on; soon he turned it off again and just stood staring at the green smoothness more and more stained with rust. Rats emerged from nowhere; they climbed trees like little monkeys, nibbling at the fruit. Water in the pool was thick with duckweed. Geraniums withered in the mighty jars, roses, uncut, scattered their petals.

After the crates were shipped away, the house inside felt immense. Stripped of carpets, the marble floors were cold and noisy underfoot. He drifted from one room to another, counting the spots on the walls where Cynthia's face had loomed in the now discarded mirrors. Her bedroom was still full of her, her perfume lingered in the cushions. Too heavy to be moved, the Sèvres-inlaid commode stood between the front windows where it had always been; presumably for *la petite* to inherit.

Mademoiselle herself, beautifully undressed because of the heat, popped in and out of the hall, scattering smiles and orders. But the curse of a great change was on every-

thing, and Pierre averted his eyes. She gave him a handsome sum, as a bonus, Martin was leaving behind the best part of his wardrobe, and the other Variolis, too, had their share in the windfall; it all only added to Pierre's discomfort. Cynthia Monroe had imposed her beauty, now she was imposing her bounty; soon she would impose a blank where joy as well as excellent wages had been.

With his father strangely unlike his old self, and Mauricette turning to stone in his arms each time Smith was mentioned, the only bright spot on Pierre's horizon was the children's Communion Day; and so he wanted everything, the food and the drinks, to be of the best quality for the celebration.

Dejected but alert, he toured the country in his spare time, taking the bus to places where rare *pâtés*, choice ingredients for the *bouillabaisse*, and the good years of local farmers' wine were obtainable at a poor man's price. On these buying sprees he occasionally dropped in for beer and that was how he met Louis in a café in Vence. The *Croix de guerre* conspicuous on his sun-bleached blouse, the invalid was sitting there talking to another man, while a thin waitress with tender eyes stood by listening, her cheek resting on her hand.

Louis was a cantankerous, middle-aged body, a plumber-struck with politics. In cafés and at public meetings he championed, and fought against, a great variety of causes. No one really knew what party's interests he had at heart, but eloquence and bachelorhood made him popular with girls, men feared his sharp tongue, and the police labeled him a Communist. In the *Maquis* he had been an ill-tempered leader, reluctant to share in the risks of his own plans, always anxious to keep "the brain of the unit" out of

danger. Luck served him well; in spite of that reticence, he had a spectacular feat to his credit: the killing of a collaborationist.

For years Pierre had avoided meeting him. The Toulon tunnel mishap had left a bad aftertaste; he knew Louis had not forgiven him the confusion which cost him a leg. But, fed up as he was with his family and the foreigners, as he saw Louis now, the distant troubles of the Resistance, its crazy people, the adventure, appeared to him in a nostalgic light, and he warmed up to his wartime chum. After all, this, here, the arguments and the gossip over a glass of wine or some beer, this was France! Something to cling to in a world of tourists.

He slapped Louis on the back, "Eh, how is life treating you, *mon commandant*?" The man jumped. "Ah, *mais* . . . this is fantastic, simply fantastic!" he exclaimed. "There is not another person in the whole wide world I want to see more than you, *espèce d'animal*! Sit down, sit down . . ." He winked at the waitress "Three Pernods, *ma jolie*, and be quick with it." He jerked his chin at the other man. "Remember Petroff, the musician? We were just talking of you, and here you descend on us out of the blue."

Yes, Pierre remembered the fellow; in the *Maquis* they called him *La Blonde*. He was a Russian, born in Nice, a member apparently of the Communist party. At the meetings of the cell he used to knit a pull-over for his boy friend. His music, they said, was played at concerts in Paris and New York. Pierre had been tremendously impressed by the fact that he was rubbing shoulders with a highbrow celebrity, and had expressed the wish to hear some of Petroff's work. Whereupon *La Blonde* had asked

him to his studio and made passes at him. Rebuffed, the Russian had affected indifference.

"Of course, I remember *La Blonde*," Pierre said, and the fellow forced a smile. Varioli was surprised to see the two together. In the old times Louis professed contempt of the homosexuals, *La Blonde* in particular.

They shook hands, the musician returned to his pose of a fallen angel, Louis looked round and lowered his tone. "Petroff just told me," he said, "that Henri is up to mischief. The *garde champêtre* is through with the dirty old poacher, and honest hunters are now subject to all kind of chicanery because of him. Even the *patronne* here will not let him in, such a nasty drunk, too, and so he is mad! He wants to bolster up his reputation, he swears he will make her marry him. You know how?" He burst into thin laughter. "He is after my *Croix de guerre*! . . . He says I got it through imposture, and he is the one that blew up the tunnel. Hear that? He imagines *la patronne* will fall for him the instant she sees my *Croix de guerre* on his breast." For quite a while he split his ribs roaring, then his face froze. "An investigation is on foot." He gave Pierre a playful push. "Who cares? I do not even mind people say *you* blew up the tunnel. Why not? So long as it makes people laugh, and you had your *médaille*. . . ." His seriousness returned. "But Henri is too good a shot, people do not laugh at *him*. Now, you are, beside me, the only one around who actually *was* on the expedition." He winked at Varioli. "Well, I wonder . . . I wonder what your opinion is going to be, Pépé? Was it I, or was it Henri?"

Petroff whistled softly while Louis, with genuine interest, watched Pierre writhe in search of proper words. "You see, Pépé, the archives of our *Réseau* were burnt, and

those others on the Toulon patrol were rabble with fake names from all over France. One may as well search a haystack for a needle."

He leaned back and contemplated Pierre's face like his own work of art: childishy arrogant, with a puckered mouth, not at all created to convey moral suffering; a face blind and mute in its confusion. A little flame sparked up Louis' eyes. "You know what I would do if I were you, Pépé?" he said thoughtfully. "I would instruct my father what to say when he is questioned about the jasmine field. No, no, do not fret! With all the dregs coming up to the surface, the *gendarmerie* are bound to poke their noses into other messes too."

Pierre's feet went cold. "I do not understand what jasmine field you are referring to," he muttered. "And what has Henri to do with my father? As to my *médaille*, I lost my arm in the *Résistance*, just as you lost your leg. Was this not good enough?"

"*Ça va, ça va.*" Louis beckoned the waitress for another drink. "No need to tell me. All I want is justice all round. But we must not forget that I paid for my *Croix* not only with my own blood, I drew blood from a traitor, too." He grinned broadly. "*Farceur, va!* You say you do not know what jasmine field I am talking about. Well . . . Petroff here will tell you. There is, it seems, an English Intelligence chap around, interested, it seems, in what happened to a certain fund his government had invested in the *Résistance*. Only the other day, Petroff spoke to him in the very same café! *Oh, là là*, do not get nervous Pépé, *on est des copains, quoi*. But, you see, that's different. That's more than a medal. Since French honor is at stake, we may well find ourselves in a position where the only way out will be

to point to a certain jasmine field. Well? I hope you understand now."

Pierre suddenly threw his beret to the floor. His mouth quivered as he stammered: "Why, why are you speaking like this to me? It is blackmail. But I never talk to *gendarmes*! Why should I? It is all ancient history and you are welcome to your Cross. Why should I talk? Henri is not my cousin, not my friend . . . Why?"

Petroff cast down his lashes with a sigh, but Louis bellowed: "You do not like the way I speak to you, *espèce de chameau*? This is ingratitude! I speak to you in a much nicer manner than your father ever does, is that not true, Petroff?" Heads were turned towards them, and from the other end of the room the thin waitress rushed up with her tray. Eyes darting in all directions, Pierre clumsily picked up his beret, and left the café without another word.

The two men at the table exchanged a look of satisfaction. Louis lit up, chuckled. "*Quel type!* Besides I always guessed he would not blab. He is too much of a skunk all round. Do you think he would have joined the *Maquis* without *La Clocharde*? Ah, *ça!* Still . . . only double sure is sure enough with me. Now that we got him properly frightened he'll rather choke than say a word. And thank you for your help, *mon vieux*. You know I am not stingy."

Petroff sadly wagged his head. "I do not like the mentality of the man. He has no ideals, no feelings. A primitive brute. A peasant. People like him are best kept in check by fear."

Paul waited for his father at the turn of the road. As he saw him get off the bus, he rushed forward. "I shall carry

the parcels for you, Papa!" He noticed the empty hands and his face fell. "You bought nothing today? Why?"

Pierre focused on his son an empty gaze. "Yes, why indeed? Why should such things happen to people?"

This sounded funny, and Paul was scared. "Papa, is somebody sick?"

No reply.

"Is *Grandpère* going to chase us off the farm because you are losing your job?"

Pierre stamped his foot. "Stop gibbering! Nobody is sick, nobody will chase us off the farm. Where is your *grandpère*? At the jasmine field?"

The boy instantly regained self-assurance. "I do not know where he is. He has become awfully lazy of late. He does not even teach César tricks, just goes for walks like a tourist. In his Sunday best, too! Is he very rich, Papa?"

Pierre turned round and boxed his ears. "It is none of your business, *nigaud*! And do not throw mud at your elders on the eve of Communion Day."

Conveniently, Paul caught sight of Suzanne feeding chickens in the coop; he vanished.

Pierre found Mauricette storing away cold dishes and freshly baked cakes for tomorrow in the thick-walled, heavily bolted *réserve*, away from children and flies. Mme. Titine sat in a rocking chair in the kitchen, telling her beads. Pierre looked round wistfully. "Where is Jacqueline?" The little girl was pretty, with a flair for dress; in his bad moments he longed for the sight of her.

"She knows how to keep her little hands white, your precious Jacqueline," Mauricette snapped. "She must be gallivanting somewhere."

Titine felt moved to protest. "Oh, no, she is not galli-

vanting. She is at church. Did you not know it was the younger children's confession time today? What a shame though, nobody went with her."

With a great clatter of keys, Mauricette was locking the *réserve*. "Send Paul! The older brother!"

Pierre's irritation mounted. "*Maman* is right. Paul himself is a child. You should be there with your daughter, Mauricette."

"*Moi?* Why not your mother? She is the pious one."

The rocking ceased. "You should not talk like this, *ma fille*. You know children laugh at me. Besides, I have *sciatica* very badly today."

Pierre riveted a stern gaze on his wife. "It would do you no harm to try to be pious once in a while, Mauricette."

Fists on her hips, she swished round her skirts. "It is not for you to lecture me, Pierre—." Her voice sounded unnaturally light.

She made for the dresser, but he jumped at her. "Wait a minute! Why is it not for me to correct you? Am I not your husband any longer? Or have you lost all decency since Smith has been making love to you in the *cabanon*?" He was shaking her. "Answer me! Why am I not fit to remind you of your duties, *hein?*"

Her face white, she said through clenched teeth: "Because of the jasmine field, that is why." He let go of her.

Tearful, stumbling on her dress, Titine retreated upstairs.

Pierre lowered himself to a chair. Miserable as a lost child, he stared silently at his wife.

Her eyes met his, and rushing up to him, gathering his head to her bosom, she burst into violent sobs. "*Pépé, mon*

chéri, forget it, forget it," she stammered. "I did not mean it. I did not. I did not. It is because I love you so much, and you seem to love your people best." She smothered him in her embrace. "I know you did it out of the goodness of your heart, *mon amour*. The money would have gone to the gutter anyway. Oh, what is happening to us? Quarrels, suspicions. . . . What is all this? I know I was beastly just now, and so are you, sometimes. But whatever you did, or will do, you are my man, and I love you, Pépé!" Her dark pupils glistening with tears, she hugged him desperately, as if he were going to die the next moment.

Half-choked, he freed himself. "Well, yes, Pépé is the man you love," he snarled. "But I am not Pépé, hear me? I was but I am not Pépé! I am not, I am not!" His face distorted into a mask of humiliation, he hurled her away from him and leapt for the door.

She ran after him. "You do not mean what you said about me and Smith, do you Pierrot?"

He slipped out of her gripping hand and slammed the door on her.

Where was he to go? He dragged himself round the house to its front and stood there leaning against the wall, breathing heavily. Well, yes! There were two people in him, and both alive. One—call him Pépé—knew full well that there had never been any love-making between Monroe-Smith and Mauricette. He also knew that Louis' threats and hints were idle talk, a part of the game the plumber amused himself by playing, setting people on each other, confusing their ideas, relishing the shocks. Neither could Pépé believe in Smith's role as an investigator of the jasmine field affair. Pépé loved Smith, *La Clocharde*, and the

Résistance. Pépé's days were filled with nameless want, insecurity, and loneliness. He who had saved Smith's life, expected Smith to save him from dying the slow death of a farmer's son.

But the other man in Pierre dreaded Pépé's flights of fancy. The other man was well content with his setup; nauseating horror filled him at the thought of Louis' denunciation and Monroe's evil power. That second man sensed with pleasure the presence of the well-stocked wallet over his breast, and felt his mouth water in anticipation of tomorrow's *bouillabaisse*. He hated *La Clocharde*, he was afraid of Louis, Henri, *La Blonde*, and his own father, above everything he was afraid of life.

The thought of suicide touched Pierre, but did not linger. There were so many things he wanted! A pink little villa in Grasse which he would call *La Coquette*; a trip to Lourdes for his mother; higher education for Paul; a movie career for Jacqueline; a rich husband for Suzanne; a fur coat for Mauricette—and a clear conscience, and a proud record of life nobly lived. Wish above wishes, he wanted his father, humbled and done up, begging him to take the helm of family affairs! What was Smith? A ghost. A week, ten days, and he would be gone. Mauricette would forget him, Paul would forget the queer girl in the tartan skirt, Pierre himself would forget that Pépé had ever dressed the wound of an Englishman.

Ah, yes, but before the campers disappear at the crowing of the cock, Smith, too, must do something for Pépé. Something quite easy: destroy him. Tell him: "There is no sense, and no way, for you, Pierre Varioli, to worry about last year's snow. *La Résistance*, international brotherhood,

equality of men, all this is last year's snow. Forget about Pépé! Forget *La Clocharde*! Look, I am not Smith any more. I am David Monroe, the cousin and the father of an heiress, an English milord with no castle, but enough money to go abroad and sleep under a tent, far from the dirt of life. The dirt of life is where *you* belong, Pierre Varioli. A clean English gypsy tent is where *I* belong. Let us both forget that Smith and Pépé have ever slept together on a straw mattress watching the stars in a *cabanon*!"

Pierre braced himself, and pulling his beret up and down his ear, headed for the path that led to the Monroe camp. He was on the terraced slope when he heard two people talk at the Roman springs below. The turf and the foliage muting the voices, he could not catch the words. He climbed on a boulder, and his heart sank: the two men were David Monroe and Henri. He suddenly felt quite hollow inside. Boastful as well as humble, sensible as well as foolish, words deserted him; a solid lump of distaste clogged his throat. He slid from the stone and lay down on the mossy ledge. The rock under his body was warm, the scant, dry grass smelled of thyme. Two thoughts went round and round in his mind: what had Henri to say to Smith? What had Smith to say to Henri?

Water splashed, the voices at the springs fell silent. A breeze brought the taste of pines shedding resin after a hot day. Pierre's heart was regaining its normal beat, the merry-go-round in his head slowed down. Whatever those two were talking about, the word of a farmer's son in the *Alpes Maritimes* would prevail over a drunken poacher's rambling and the gibberish of a foreign gypsy! He spread his good arm over the bristling earth. It was going to be

his—after his father's death. As sleep forced down his eyelids, he heard a rock fall, and it seemed to him that he saw the pink walls of *La Coquette* crumbling down in his dream-land.

19

As the first sunray touched Agnes' face, David watched her blink in her sleep, and he wondered at the change. Early mornings in a double bed used to be the worst part of their married life. He was a late sleeper; stubbornly, morosely his body fought any attempt at awakening before it had its fill of relaxation and dreams. She, on the other hand, was an early riser, impatient to get things done in the morning freshness. But since they had returned to sleeping together in France, the situation seemed reversed. This time it was David who stretched out his arms.

After they had had coffee and had sent Pat off to the village some hours later, they talked and Agnes said: "You know, David, what you called morning pep in me was just restlessness; I thought, one day I'll wake up, and you'll be gone. That's why I always wanted to wake up before you."

"You don't think that anymore?"

"No. I don't. Unless you're a great actor . . . Well, let's go for that swim."

They bathed, and swam, and baked in the sun. On the beach in Cannes, all round them, and higher up in the casino gardens where the more placid humanity lounged, peo-

ple exposed themselves to Nature. The young affected intimacy with the elements. They dived, spat, rode the waves and each other's backs, embraced, wriggled like snakes, and slumbered like sphinxes in the heat. They also shot into space on water skis and gyroplanes. Children screamed in the water, or else ignored the visible world, digging with colorful spades for underground treasures.

Those in the background, however, the middle-aged and the elderly, the women sparkling with diamond rings, the men in immaculate slacks with newspapers held at a fair distance from their sunshaded eyes, represented the guarded approach. Nature, yes, had curative qualities by which they were too rich and well-informed not to profit. But at the same time they were suspicious of nonhuman narcotics, the effluvia of spheres yet unexplored.

All of them though, the naked and the dressed, the young, the old, the enthusiasts and the skeptics, all stuck together in a crowded space, a herd uncertain of their pastures. Fluctuating between *forte* and *piano*, in an offbeat rhythm, voices melted into dissonant laughter, anxiety, and love call. As they lay on the sand, across the Monroe field of vision girls' legs stalked gingerly on their toes; from one bunch of algae to the other, transparent sea creatures hopped; a poodle's muzzle sniffed at a stranger's trail; a shadow, a wing, a cloud, a child's plump foot moved through the pocket-sized Sahara. The picture was a scattered jigsaw puzzle, but there was no need for Agnes and David to make it whole again.

"I somehow never gave much thought to how much fun there was in not living, just being alive," David remarked. With a piece of black driftwood perhaps chopped off a wreck by a stream, he wrote AGNES and DAVID on the

sand, then passed a hand over the letters making the surface smooth again.

The gesture upset her. "Why did you do it?"

"For no dramatic reason, dear. Soon we'll be gone, and no one will remember we've ever been here."

"Except us." She shook her wet hair vigorously. "So long as I live, David, I'll be grateful to France for what it did to you, this time."

He contrived a cheerless smile. "I'd be thankful, too, if . . ."

"If what?"

"Oh, there are many *ifs*, as you know."

"Go on, tell me." She prodded him with the same ancient piece of wood.

"For one, *if* it is true that you're safe with me now."

"D'you mean you still want to leave me?" Busily, she sifted the sand through her cupped fingers.

"Oh, come on!" he frowned. "You know very well that in my own somnambulistic way I was bent on you even at Eton. I don't think I could ever leave you. Not of my own accord, that is."

Afraid of the sands running out too quickly, she closed her hand. "Who can make you do what you don't want to?"

"Oh, this is childish. For all I know, you may, or time. Time changes people. Well, this brings me to another *if*."

"Yes, David?"

"I would be grateful to France, if Pierre were not so changed. He's a different man now." He brooded for a while. "You see . . . the whole situation is absurd. Too much was changed too quickly. Loyalties . . . maps . . . laws. . . . But I stuck by my private little myth of the Resistance." He wrote RESISTANCE on the sand, and wiped it out.

She looked on diffidently. "Resist what? Wasn't the Resistance part of a war? Well, the Allies won, and the Resistance helped. What more d'you want?"

"Apparently too much," he said, and his Adam's apple moved.

He chucked a pebble into the sea right over the head of a fat bathing belle who took it to mean an advance and waved. He turned his back on her. "Resist what? Well, for instance that sow over there playing at a siren. Anything. The stupidity of the world. The ugliness of the world. The bloody conceit of a body that refuses to grow into something humble."

His long limbs tense with resentment, to Agnes he looked exactly like that boy in Trusfield Hall, refusing twenty years ago a horse and a cruise. She reached out to him, but he ducked his head. "You say 'allies'. . . . Where are they? A nice cold war going on and on between 'sister nations' and 'brotherly concerns!' Nation! Class! Ideology! And it's always the same old whore beaming at simpletons: Pride."

She stroked his leg. "You never talked to me like this before, Davvie. But . . ." her voice fell to a murmur "I hope you noticed that I had no pride at all."

The sails of a yacht drifting toward the harbor filled up; out of an immaculate sky a hot blast suddenly descended, whipping up the sea and the sands. Women's hair flew, skirts were inflated, people threw clothes over babies and their own wet costumes, ran after their dogs and airborne magazines, and rushed for the cars. The beach and the *Croisette*, swept clean of customers, soon became one big hypnotized mouse, unable to breathe. "D'you still want to resist, David?" Agnes smiled.

David got up. He collected the towels. "Let's go and see how our tent is resisting."

Pat knew that it was both Sunday and Communion Day. But as her mother had buttered her sandwiches for school, she had done nothing to stop her. She had only asked for more sausage and no jam. "I didn't realize you were such a tremendous sausage-eater," her father had remarked. "What time will you be back?"

"The usual time," she had said. They clearly had forgotten it was not a school day and let her go without further questioning.

Since they seemed happy, she did not mind their being absent-minded, and little she cared for Cannes. She had work to do, an important job. Something only grownups did: business. No one could be more grown-up than she was, Martin said it only the other day. And Cynthia said: "You can do with the Abbey what you wish, Pat."

And so she leapt and bounced down the hill, heading for the Roman springs. She was excited, her throat dry. On the narrow pass a view opened on an old olive mill bordered by tall slim palms. Usually, if no one was watching her, she called to them "*Bonjour, Mesdames*," then hurried on, afraid that they might answer her in a tongue she would not understand. Today, before she could even take a peep at them, she had to double up; a wind as hard as a giant's fist struck her on the chest. Yesterday, she recalled, Paul had said a storm was coming; the sky had looked like a glass roof. She straightened up and glanced at *Mesdames*. Indeed, they were not *dames* anymore wearing plumes to the palace, to be received by the Queen; they were witches whirling in a crazy dance. She stopped to catch her breath,

then rushed down the slope. It was quieter there, but everywhere the air seemed to shed angry tears which glistened in the sun.

She took the path to the farm and soon was slipping into the yard by the artichokes. Tied up at the stable door, César barked there, jumping on his chain. She came near him, he crouched, and she stroked his worried head. "Nice doggie, poor dirty old doggie . . ." While, eyes shut in anticipation of bliss, he opened his jaws, she opened her basket. One brisk movement, and the sausage disappeared. She was reaching for another piece as she felt somebody's stare fixed on her: on the stable's doorstep stood Baptiste Varioli. She flushed, but cried out gaily: "*Bonjour, Monsieur Varioli!* I came to tell you that Cynthia gave the olives to me, and I am giving them to you, that is all. You may have them, for keeps."

He glared on. Then, raising his arm as if to strike her, he roared: "Get out of here! You are too small to receive, or give property away! Did I not tell you to leave that dog alone? Clear out or you will catch it!" Someone pulled him back. "*Ça va, ça va*, do not unnerve yourself, Papa"—Pierre Varioli spoke in a hushed voice. "English little girls are often naughty, but it is their parents' fault."

To this she stuck her chin up. "Oh, no, Mr. Varioli! It is not my parents' fault, it is my own sin."

Pierre grinned. "And what do you know about sin, *Mademoiselle*? You were not taught catechism, and—"

"Of course I was," she interrupted him. "Paul let me have his book for a whole day once." Meaning to ask after him she emerged from behind the wheelbarrow where she had sought shelter a moment before, but the men turned their backs on her and went into the stable.

Both in their best clothes, at first they contemplated silently, as the donkey Louloutte munched away at the manger, then Baptiste growled: "What was that about the olives?"

Pierre feigned astonishment. "Did I not tell you Mlle. Cynthia made the Abbey over to the *petite diablesse*?"

"No. Was the girl sent here by her father to spite me, then? If he wants to sell the olives, why does he not come himself?"

His neck reddened, and Pierre hastened to appease him. "Why, no, Papa, I am sure he did not send her at all. He lets the girl have her own way in whatever enters her silly head. I bet he approves of her giving you the grove."

"How does she know I want it?"

"Oh, là là, you know how children gossip at school. Do not worry. The grove is as good as yours, Papa."

Baptiste seemed to chew something of a nasty taste. The queer, irreverent things the child was allowed to say to her mother, her pluck with strangers and dogs, her unnaturally good French were poison to him. "I do not want gifts from a brat!" he said, and added grimly, "You had better not let Paul keep company with a gypsy, my son."

Time was flying. The High Mass preceding the children's Communion was to begin soon, and Pierre had not yet had the chance to broach the subject he had come to discuss with his father. Anxious to humor him, he turned a deaf ear on what, he thought, was the ritual show of pride.

"The English, of course, have no manners," he said. "Smith ought to have come himself. But, Papa, I am sure I can arrange the affair for you. On honorable terms, you know. I shall see Smith tonight. I shall tell him you can-

not accept this kind of a present. If he insists, he can fix a price." He winked at the old man. "A nominal price, of course. Let us say ten, fifteen thousand francs or so. . . . What do you say to that? You always wanted the grove, and here is the chance of your life, Papa." Excited as a schoolboy, he rubbed his hands. Beams creaked, the wind tugged furiously at the roof.

Baptiste glanced sharply at his son. The same angry force that belabored the walls and the trees seemed to shake his body; he winced and slapped Pierre's face.

For a few seconds nothing could be heard but the swishing of palm leaves outside and the long shiver running down Louloutte's spine; then Baptiste spoke. "Go and beg for yourself, you English lackey! I do not want foreigners to do me favors, not I!"

As if in answer, a match was struck, and he jumped. In the straw-filled shack any spark might start a fire, and in the storm there would be no mercy. "You mad? Get out of here!" He was making for the light, but Pierre hurled him back.

"I will, in my own good time, Father," he said, his jaws working. "A father is a father, you know, only so long as he is not an enemy. I am warning you: Henri put the *gendarmérie* on the scent. Your jasmine stinks. It stinks so badly that it made Smith sneeze. Oh, yes, I shall certainly go and beg him not to ruin the family's reputation. But if he refuses, you will be the one to foot the bill, *mon père*."

He lit a Gauloise with a steady hand, inhaled deeply, and went out of the stable into the wind.

20

Pat did not like the way Baptiste Varioli had treated her, but then she never expected him to be any kinder to her than he was to César. Once outside the farm, she had to decide what to do next. Hissing and bouncing, the storm turned the crowns of the trees upside down, quite as the London wind sometimes did with the ladies' umbrellas. Broken boughs were tearing through the air, but it was fun being pushed down the road, and her legs ran by themselves. It felt more like flying with the leaves than skipping with the goats. Mother thinks I'm at school, she doesn't fret, Pat thought. I know she made herself scarce with Daddy in the tent, the tent is tied down with strong ropes, they are safe, they laugh.

Church bells were tolling. She could not halt to catch her breath; her pleated tartan skirt fluttering, she flew into the village square.

It was different there. Houses and the plane trees held the storm at bay. People hurried to High Mass, and like disheveled angels, girls from Pat's *classe* drifted in, one by one, their organdy frocks blown up into balloons, veils like clouds of white smoke above their heads. As they tried to keep the finery in place, beating down their skirts, their mothers and fathers were hovering over them. Some children did not have their tulle on; rolled into a snowball, the stuff was carried by older people to be carefully unfolded

on the porch, and arranged round the garland on a *communianté's* head. Two schoolmates whose skimpy skirts were not worrying them, nodded to Pat.

Looking for Paul and Jacqueline, she craned her neck as pushed on and on, she found herself in a side nave in the church. She had been to Mass once before, with Mme. Titine. She liked Paul's grandmother, because Mme. Titine was like Jesus Christ: she loved thieves, she loved her magpie, Margot. But she had never explained church things to Pat, except the Mass being in Latin. Now Pat wracked her brain guessing whom *M. le Vicaire* in his splendid robes was bowing to at the altar. Our Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Ghost. In Paul's catechism it said that the three persons were one big person—God. It also said all people were sinners because of the apple the greedy woman had eaten in a garden. But Pat had seen *M. le Vicaire* eat, even without peeling it, one of Cynthia's apples at the Abbey garden. A sinner like him would perhaps choose one of the lesser persons to say sorry to. Which person? Jesus or the Spirit?

Chanting Latin words, closing his eyes as if ashamed of himself, *M. le Vicaire* turned round. He opened his arms, the people around sang:

*Devant la croix levons nos coeurs,
Suivons Jésus, le Rédempteur.*

The Person of their choice was Jesus; Pat was glad. She went down on her knees and began to pray:

“Dear Jesus, you are a loving person and everybody loves you. Mr. Dobson, he is a window

cleaner in London, he loves you. And I do. And thieves, and the fairies. We are not Catholics but we do, because you love everybody. So, please, don't be angry with Eve. I'm sure she did not mean to be greedy, and *M. le Vicaire* wasn't. I did not mean to hurt Paul. Dad and Mum didn't, ever, mean to hurt each other. Besides they're not fighting any more, they go places together, and sit at night holding hands. Paul certainly did not mean to be naughty. He fights me and tickles me, but he wants me to stick around, and I will. Please, which sin was the naughtiest, my letting Paul tickle me, or striking him? Dear Jesus, I'm sorry I don't understand, but I love Latin. I love *la Sainte Trinité*, *la Sainte Vierge*, and *l'Immaculée Conception*; I love things I do not understand. I must say I rather like old Varioli, too. He's dirty, but I'm sure he doesn't mean to be wicked, he just barks, and I am sorry for him. Oh, and Cynthia and Martin are good spivs, I mean thieves, I love them. Amen."

M. le Vicaire lifted his arms chanting some more Latin. The people sang:

*Seigneur, Dieu le Père, nous sommes vos enfants.
Ayez pitié de nous . . .*

As they always tried to interfere with their children, Pat was shy of fathers. But Our Father in Paul's catechism was one of the Holy Three. She had thought he was only one-third God, yet they called him Almighty. She made an effort to concentrate, she knew that lessons sometimes were

difficult, and you could not understand arithmetic, you just had to believe in it. Also *le père* meant someone working hard to give his children food and education. In Paul's book *Dieu le Père* was the father of Adam, the first man. He made him out of clay, gave him a beautiful garden to live in, but had to chase him out of it, because, instead of Our Father, Adam listened to greedy Eve.

The organ roared, the tune was very grand, little bells tinkled at the altar, and Pat prayed:

"Our Father, Mr. Dobson says Thou art in Heaven. He says it is a wonderful place. Still, I rather like it here. I know that children and grandchildren are naughty, and sometimes you just have to send them to hell—But, please, Our Father, if I am greedy, or strike Paul, and you have to chase me out of France, let Paul come along with me, Almighty God. Amen."

Her knees hurt, she was pleased to see everybody stand up. They crossed themselves, and she did the same. A big book was carried over from the right side of the altar to the left. *M. le Vicaire* followed it, and started reading aloud in Latin.

Pat knew there were many languages. Clocks ticked in one; things, flowers, and creatures had their own. When all was quiet invisible persons spoke, and one of them was God. She listened carefully to what Our Father wrote in his own book. Since it sometimes happened that she understood frogs, she hoped she would understand Latin. *M. le Vicaire* mumbled under his nose and she gave up the effort.

As soon as he finished, people again began to push.

And again she was carried away by the crowd, this time into the aisle where, stiff as sugar dolls, the *communiantes* stood, paired with boys who were wearing white cockades in their lapels, a myrtle twig in the center.

A much bigger altar—flowers and candles—gleamed in the sanctuary. Dressed in what looked like a fancy shirt thrown over his usual black, *M. le Curé* could be seen walking up over the winding stairs to a pulpit shaped more like a box. As he climbed up, the voices of the organ and the choir climbed down, till they melted into one with the spicy smells trailing over the pews.

For a while only coughing and clearing of throats was heard, then *M. le Curé* began to read, very loudly, out of a book in French. The first words were "At that time . . ." and the story ran on about *les apôtres*, which perhaps meant some kind of busy men gathering in a house.

Pat tried to pay attention, but could not; in the white and black line of children she at last saw Jacqueline, recognizing her by the lace Cynthia had given her to wear instead of the usual veil. One of the pair behind his sister was Paul. They both were not very far, yet in a forest of bodies it was difficult for Pat to focus on two small heads.

Now that the organ fell silent, she could hear the wind outside, a dull howling, as it interfered with *M. le Curé's* story. The sun shone through the colored windows streaking the girls' veils, throwing blue, red, and golden bridges across the air, making everything seem unreal.

Pat's eyes wandered up and down those luminous bridges till they stopped by a picture on the wall. Jesus sat there, horrible in a garland of thorns. *He* seemed real. Drops of blood trickled down his cheeks, he was naked, he shivered. In the hollows where eyes should

be, there was pain. In his arms he hugged a useless piece of stick, while men dressed in something like kilts brandished whips.

Mr. Dobson had explained to her how people had beaten up and crucified Jesus because he wanted them to love each other. But Pat had never seen a loving person in such a miserable state; she felt like crying. Just then *M. le Curé* closed his book. His voice from dull changed to thunderous. He said: "My dear children," and Pat's ears immediately ceased to hear. She remembered what usually followed such words. It would be a lecture on how they should obey their parents and the teacher, do the home-work, and brush their teeth. A rare word, however, came through, and she started.

"The soul—*l'âme*, although invisible—is the only thing in you that matters," *M. le Curé* thundered. "It never dies! Jeanne d'Arc knew it, and she did not mind being burnt. Of course, not all souls are hail and hearty like Jeanne d'Arc's. Some are sick; they are sinful. When a sick body dies, a sick soul does not die with it. It goes to Hell, an awful place where you live forever, tortured by the devils. My dear children—" *M. le Curé* wiped his brow with a big handkerchief "—to avoid your soul falling sick, you must be good. But if you have the misfortune of getting into mischief, you have to confess, and be given Holy Communion, the Angels' Bread, which cures all sin. Then, even if you die, you are safe: your soul goes to Heaven, a lovely place which here on earth we cannot behold."

The girls rustled their white frocks, they fingered the little golden crosses that hung on thin golden chains from their necks. Boys fidgeted, craning their necks to see what the other boys were doing. Pat remembered what Mr. Dob-

son had said in London: "Of course you'll live forever; you're a good kid." But she was not a good kid any longer; she was a sinner.

She tried to catch sight of Paul's head, shiny with brilliantine, but could not. He must have drifted to a spot behind a column; she felt terribly alone, and shifted her gaze to the pictures on the wall. A sunray that had entered the church through the center of a rose in a stained-glass window, touched now—a red streak—the robes of Jesus who knelt among trees. In this picture Jesus had no thorns in his head, his hair flowed smoothly down his neck, his clothes were whole, nobody was beating him, yet there was even greater pain where his eyes should be. Jesus was looking up. It surprised Pat to see that he was staring at a golden chalice in the air. The ruby-colored ray played with the chalice, and it seemed as if there were red wine inside it. Yet the kneeling Jesus suffered. Pat surveyed the further space between the trees. A few people in loose gowns lay there on the grass. They slept. Jesus was alone. He certainly was afraid of night. Certainly he did not want to drink alone from the enchanted chalice. There was certainly poison in the chalice, something very bitter. Pat sighed, and read the inscription under the picture: "Jesus Suffers in the Olive Grove." She started. Didn't she want Paul to burn the olive grove?

M. le Curé went back to *les apôtres* now. One of them—he said—spoke to the strangers who were mobbing them: "You think you killed Jesus, yet he is alive. God made him alive again. Jesus sent us the *Saint Esprit*, like a gust of wind. It filled us. It made us understand all the tongues, and talk all the langu—."

He was in the middle of the word "languages" when

rolling down the aisle a tremendous noise filled the church; the wind had forced the door. It swept up the skirts and the veils, candle flames flickered, then grew into fiery tongues. People stood up; some rushed to the porch to bolt the ancient door on which saints and beasts were carved.

Pat's legs trembled; she felt very faint. For the life of her she could not tell who it was that sang:

*Esprit Saint, Dieu de lumière,
Venu des cieux sur la terre . . .*

—the children, or the angels floating on a plaster cloud over *M. le Curé's* box. She only knew that Jesus had just sent the Third Person down to the church. Turbulent and airy, the *Saint Esprit* was tugging at the flames, making the candles burn like torches, filling people's heads with understanding.

Her own head heavy, she knelt down. She could not pray, she was too tired. Claspings her hands, she just muttered: "*Merci*, dear Jesus, for sending *le Saint Esprit* here. Thank you, *Saint Esprit*, for filling me. Thank you."

There was a blank in her mind. She got up, and inch by inch moved toward a pillar nearby. The French whispered: "Look at the *petite Anglaise* . . ." "What is she doing here?" "Is the child not a Protestant?" "Look at her skirt . . . her plaits . . . what has she got in that basket of hers?" A hot breath enveloped Pat's face, and she winced. She tried not to inhale, lest the garlic should offend the *Saint Esprit* in her. Turning round she pleaded, "*Pardon, pardon,*" as she jostled, pushed, slid between the big legs. A man helped her to the side door; she was free.

In the square the wind was waiting. Oblivious of

having been the *Saint Esprit* only a moment before, it whipped up dust and knocked people about. Pat coughed—she listened—she was not sure any longer that she understood its language.

21

Swish, swish, like silver knives, palm leaves cut through the air, and the clock rattled in its iron cage on top of the church tower. If it were a school day, this now would be break. In her basket Pat still had bread, fruit, and some chocolate, the leftovers from César's treat. There also were many things she wanted to tell Paul. But waiting for him in the square was no use; after Mass he would be surrounded by his family and village friends.

She directed herself to the Abbey. The wind was not tugging at her so badly now, it seemed tired. Yet as she reached the grove, she felt pretty subdued herself. She crept into the *cabanon* and lay down on the straw. An olive branch jerked to and fro across the open arch, reminding her of something . . . Oh, yes; on the day they passed the *Domaine* for the first time in the car, she heard her father tell her mother how he had been sick, a soldier, once, in the same *cabanon*, and a branch outside was swaying. . . . It gave her quite a turn to think how old the branch was, since it had swayed even before she was born. Would it also sway after she had died?

Now that she knew about the invisible soul in her be-

ing un-die-able, she did not mind dying. She rather enjoyed the idea of living invisibly after death; it would be fun, she thought, not to have teeth to brush and legs to be tickled and a stomach to be fed, and yet feel clean, tickled, and full of mint candy. There was only her sin that worried her. To live after death, her sick soul had to be made well before.

The branch swayed, and it swayed Pat into sleep. After a time of which she was not aware, as she reopened her eyes, she started and sat up; someone watched her. It was Paul. At once she saw that he was different; he did not come to play, he came to be admired. Resplendent in his white stockings and tie, his knees as clean as his face, he shone. "I shall carry the Cross in the procession," he said, and looked away.

She felt shy. "Did you have Communion?" He nodded gravely. "Is your soul all right now?"

He shrugged. "Why did you not put on your Sunday things?" His eyes darkened with resentment. "I was ashamed of you at church. Have you seen Jacqueline's dress?"

She hung her head. "I have. She looked a lovely bride."

The association startled him; not ready to abandon his posture of a model bearer of the Cross, he still shed some of the solemnity. "If we are to marry, you must become a Catholic and dress properly for church!" He nudged her leg with his foot.

She smoothed out her skirt. "I know. And I must make my sick soul all right again."

Again he assumed the haughty air. "I must go now. There is a terrific *déjeuner* at home, the *Curé* is coming. I cannot eat your sandwiches today."

"No." She quite saw the point. "I did not eat them either. I do not want to, so long as my soul is sick."

He started to leave when she caught him by the sleeve. "Wait! Have you confessed to my sin, too?"

He blinked in surprise: "What sin? One does not confess to other people's sins."

"But it was also your sin! Don't you remember? You said you liked it. Then I hit you, and you hit me. We were fighting."

"Oh, that!"—he grinned—"I just said impurity. The *Curé* knows what it means, one does not have to explain."

She was not satisfied. "How do you want me to become a Catholic if my soul is sick? I must confess."

He seemed perplexed. Tossing up the little cedar cones, he pondered for a while. "All right!" he decided. "Go and confess. But there will be no confessions till next Saturday."

She looked round. The olive grove seemed a sad place to her. Shrubs were bristling with thorns, the ancient trees, like bearded beasts, stood in brooding silence. For certain someone suffered here at night while the others slept. Someone was afraid, and did not want to drink poison out of an enchanted chalice. Someone. Perhaps Jesus?

She shook her head. "I cannot wait till next Saturday. Did you not hear *M. le Curé* said our sins make Jesus suffer. I do not want to make Jesus suffer another week because I kicked and bit you . . . and the other sin. You hear my confession now."

He opened his eyes wide. "What? I am not a *curé*, I cannot listen to confessions."

She would not be discouraged. "Oh, yes you can.

Your soul is all right, and you will be carrying the Cross. You are quite like a *curé* now."

The idea puzzled him, not unpleasantly. "Suppose I am like a *curé* now . . ." He contemplated his highly polished black shoes. "So what? What do you want me to do with your sin?"

"That is easy!" she exclaimed, skipping on one leg. "I read it in your catechism book. It is called Penance. I confess, and you forgive me. That is all."

"Oh, no it is not!" He scowled. "Penance means the *Curé* tells you to do something for your punishment, because you were bad. Something you do not like at all."

"All right!" She halted in her skipping. "I do not mind. You tell me what to do to punish myself, and I shall do it. But first I must confess." Quick as lightning, she fell on her knees. "You stay right where you are, Paul." Before he could say knife, she was already reciting: "I am confessing to God, One in the Holy Trinity, that I loved it when Paul was tickling me. I struck him, and bit him, and loved the fighting. I am sorry. I shall not let him tickle me again. If he does, I shall not strike him and bite him. But if I do, I shall try not to love it. Please, God, make me love holding hands with Paul. Amen." She kissed his unusually white hand, which he jerked back as if she had singed it.

Very upset, he cried: "You are wicked, wicked! It is not like this people confess! You are a heretic, and I cannot listen to you. You ought to be burnt!"

She went off into a peal of laughter. "You can not. You can not burn me without burning the olive grove. Do you want to burn it? No, you do not! But you know what you can do? You can prick me with a needle for penance. There

is a needle in the box in the *cabanon*. Shall I find it for you?"

He turned on her a face paler than his hands: "You are tempting me!" he bawled. "I am to carry the Cross. I cannot prick you with a needle! You do your penance yourself." His whole body shaking, his feet pounding down the slope, he disappeared.

Again she was alone, and hungry. She bit off a piece of bread, but it would not go down her throat. She remembered something, something from the book: to go hungry was called Fasting; it was Penance. Promptly she spat out the piece of bread and lay down on the straw. The branch was swaying. It looked like old Varioli's arm threatening her. "Clear out of here, or you will catch it!" She shivered; Baptiste had not struck her, yet she felt pain even now. She wondered at the different kinds of pain, some bad and some good, some real and some not real. Was the not-real pain, such as when she thought of Baptiste, good? Was Penance a good pain? Was a good pain real? Was Jesus feeling a good pain when he was afraid of the enchanted chalice? Are all olive groves enchanted? And shouldn't this one here be burnt rather than given to Baptiste Varioli? Her head swam. She joined her hands as she had seen the *communiantes* do, and prayed on her knees:

"Dear Jesus, I am sorry I am a dunce. You sent the *Saint Esprit* to the church, and I still do not understand. Dear Jesus, please ask Our Father to let me go on without understanding. May I love Paul whatever he does to me? Please let me, and stop that branch swaying. Amen."

After a while her hunger died down. She felt quite cheerful, and even considered for a moment dropping in at the Abbey, but after confession she did not really want kissing and petting, which could not be avoided with Cynthia. All she wanted was to do Penance, to please Jesus Christ.

In the *cabanon* the broom, her old horse, still stood in a corner. She mounted it and rode to the old well. "Good afternoon, *Mme. l'Eau*." She bent over the dim mirror. "Remember me? I'm not Jeanne d'Arc any longer. I'm a sinner, I'm doing Penance. Want my fruit?" She chucked a peach over the edge. "There! I gave the olives to old Variloi, so if ever there's a fire, you'd better put it out after all. *Merci*." She leaned the broom against the cedar tree. "*Chevalier Cèdre*, you may have my horse. . . ." Then she felt greatly astonished. This was no Penance at all! She loved giving things away.

The anxiety returned. Paul had said: "Do your Penance yourself." How? She remembered the rude doctor in London ordering her to walk on all fours to see if she had a good heart. That had been a disgrace. But if she were to do it of her own accord, would it perhaps be Penance? A good pain. She went down on all fours and started to crawl toward the *cabanon*. Her legs and arms felt weak, her head ached, black spots flickered before her eyes, but as she reached the *cabanon* she was happy. Lying down, she pressed her cheek to the nice cushion Cynthia had let her take out of the drawing room; now she almost could not hear the wind. But she heard Jesus. "All right, Pat," He said. "I liked your Penance. Take a rest." She murmured back, "I will, dear Jesus. You are very kind."

Again time passed. The sun had wandered a long way

round the *cabanon*, and the sky was deeper when she looked up. The branch was swaying. Its lashing movement went through Pat's heart. She knew what it meant: her Penance was not enough, Our Father was still angry with her. A shiny object caught her eye; it was a rusting pair of scissors. She snatched it and punched her legs with it again and again. A few drops of blood stood out. She groaned, "Now I'm like you, dear Jesus," and threw the scissors away.

It was getting late. I must go and see Paul carrying his cross, she thought.

As Pat slipped into the side nave again, the procession was halfway round the church. White with foam, golden boats swinging on it, rainbows, many of them, soaring over it, it moved like a slow river. Paul was the first member of the congregation she saw. Holding a slim black cross with an ivory Jesus nailed to it, he stalked at the head of the crowd. Priests and nuns crept behind him, sheltering the flickering candles with their hands; bearing holy pictures and statues on gilt carriers, older girls in white drifted after them while signs and banners of every color floated high through the murky air. Under a canopy, *M. le Curé*, swathed in heavy brocade, proceeded, nursing a small sun in his arms. Little girls walked backward, curtsying as they threw petals at his feet. The bells of the choir-boys tinkled, a pungent smell filled the nostrils; everybody sang.

Pat moved along at the same snail's pace till she found herself in the same chapel as in the morning. It was empty and dark and she knelt down on her aching knees, quite sure that no one would see her there. Yet the head of the procession was even slower than its tail; and soon she

heard the familiar whisperings: "Look at the *petite Anglaise*. . . . How pale she is. . . . She is praying all alone, on her knees. . . . She looks like a Christian martyr. . . . Is it not a miraculous conversion?"

Paul noticed her. The cross trembled in his hand as he saw the white face of the *petite diablesse*, and the blood-stained handkerchief round her leg. His heart leaped up to his throat, and it stayed there. "Oh, *mon cher Jésus*," he groaned. "What am I to do? She pricked herself with a rusty old needle! I know she is a witch, and still I love her. She is a devil, and I love her. I love her better than *Papa, Maman*, and *Grandpère*. *Dieu de miséricorde*, what am I to do?"

All of a sudden the words of *M. le Vicaire* at a catechism lesson came back to him: "Jesus Christ, Himself a Lamb of God, bled and died on the Cross for us sinners." Paul shuddered. What if Pat were not a witch and a devil? What if the bloodstained handkerchief on her leg meant that she bled for Paul's sin, and that she, too, was a lamb of God?

His teeth chattered. "*Sainte Marie toujours Vierge*, help me!" he prayed. I cannot leave Pat to do such a terrible penance alone. . . . *M. le Curé* only told me to say Ave Maria three times, and *cette andouille* goes and pricks herself with a needle. I cannot bear it, I cannot. *Notre Dame de toutes les douleurs*, make Pat forget the tickling and the fights, and I shall never eat her sandwiches again. Amen."

The procession was thinning out, falling apart, dissolving into groups. Families gathered round the *communiantes*; kneeling down and springing up again, choir-boys scurried in all directions. Jacqueline had a whole

crowd to admire her. Beaming with pride, stroking her lace, returning the friends' compliments, Pierre Varioli stood behind her, while Suzanne displayed her flower basket. In case the wind got stronger, Mauricette held woollens ready for her daughters. Baptiste was nowhere to be seen, but in the family pew Mme. Titine sat bolt upright, looking lonely.

Still in his surplice, Paul deposited the cross in the sacristy and slid into Pat's chapel. Having done with prayer, she perched, quite cheerful, on a chair. He touched her knee. "What have you done to yourself, silly?" His voice was gruff. "People say you were converted, but I cannot ask you to supper. You know *Grandpère* does not like you." The gruff voice broke.

She shrugged it off. "I do not like parties."

This brightened him up. "I shall not eat the cakes. I shall save them for you. Just you go to your own mother now, and be good," he babbled. "Tomorrow at the *cabanon* you will get more of everything than any of the guests. All right?"

She shook her head. "I do not want cakes. I want the Angel's Bread."

"You mean Holy Communion, stupid? You know I cannot give you that. Besides, I have no time. They are waiting for me."

She flew off the chair. "Look!" She pointed to the tabernacle in the main altar. "See the little cabinet? It will not take you long to take the golden goblet out of it and give me one of the round white things to swallow. I am very hungry."

He looked round at the empty church. The witch—or perhaps God's bleeding lamb—and himself, a sinner ab-

solved under too light a penance, seemed the only living souls in the dense blue darkness. He glanced at his surplice and felt like a real *curé*, for he had the key to the tabernacle in his pocket, given him in the sacristy a minute ago when *M. le Vicaire* had said: "After you put out the candles, Paul, be sure to return this key to the sexton for me." The two very tall candles were still burning on the main altar. . . . Paul's lashes fluttered, and his heart turned from the pounding in his mind: she is hungry, and I cannot ask her to supper.

He darted out of the chapel. Running on tiptoe across the aisle and up the steps and carpet in the sanctuary, he fervently beat his breast. Before the statue of St. Anthony he stopped and groped for the old extinguisher behind the saint's back. Carefully he snuffed the candles. Two trails of smoke unfurled and spread over the stalls; silent, frightening, the church watched.

But at the marble balustrade Pat already waited on her aching knees. He rushed up the altar steps. The little key turned; he grabbed the chalice. Gold and jewels glittered; it was heavy. Damned, breathless, all shiver and glory, Paul tumbled down the steps to where Pat knelt. She opened her mouth, and he put the Host on her tongue.

Paul had locked the chalice back in the tabernacle and was returning the extinguisher to its place when he heard a man clear his throat. Baptiste Varioli came up the aisle. His face sunk in gloom, he passed by Pat like a walking dummy, almost knocking her off her feet. Up to the sanctuary he went.

Without a word he stared at Paul. "You come with me," he said.

22

Baptiste Varioli felt the bitter taste of frustration more sharply than ever before. Only a little while ago he had been proud of his grandson. People had told him how impressed they were by the boy's serious manner at church and the appreciation shown him by the clergy. After the procession Baptiste had looked for him, meaning to give Paul a silver watch, a family heirloom. . . . It all turned into mockery now.

Since no one except himself had witnessed the shameful scene, the sacrilege did not worry Baptiste so much as the fact that a foreign brat had prevailed with Paul over his family's beliefs. He had no idea what punishment to mete out to him. In Varioli's old age, his back still remembered the thrashings administered on the kitchen bench by his father; the buckled belt with which he himself used to whip Pierre still hung on the scullery door. Yet the nearer home they were, the obligation to beat Paul appeared more and more pointless to Baptiste.

After returning the key to the sexton, the boy, neither frightened nor contrite, frankly hostile, trailed behind his grandfather, kicking up dust with his best shoes. What use was there to exert one's arm if the result would be nil? Baptiste could not find words to express what he felt, and so they trudged in silence.

Paul's outrage had not come unprepared. What with

the storm, and Pierre showing disrespect to his father, Titine making eyes at the *Curé* at church, and *La Clocharde* preparing to play hostess in the Varioli home, the morning had already been an ordeal.

The wind was blowing. The boy, his hands in his pockets, the collar of his coat turned up, seemed to enjoy it; whirling with the leaves, he threw his hair back in a movement that reminded one of the donkey Louloutte. Watching him out of the corner of an eye, Baptiste's wrath turned slowly to pity. Ridiculous young fool! It would not be long before life knocked sense into him. Or would it? Life, too, seemed to become senseless. After all, it was not Paul's fault that an English girl was allowed to make a nuisance of herself intruding on a Catholic service, gibbering nonsense, pestering a French boy. It was the school's fault, it was the modern world's fault, it was the fault of such parents as Pierre and Mauricette. Baptiste would not thrash Paul; for the time being he would lock him up in the shed with César, the other disobedient creature, and to-morrow was another day.

After the boy morosely, yet not without signs of relief, had entered his jail, Baptiste Varioli suddenly lost grip on himself. Being loath to join the company in the house, he thought for a while, then decided to go and have a look at his vines. But as he arrived at the vineyard, the wish to check on the damage caused by the wind somehow deserted him. Claspings his cap with one hand, the lapels of his coat with the other, he eased himself onto a rocky shelf; that thirst for a great change was plaguing him again.

The red-haired woman was, of course, no change;

she was a mad dream of his youth come back to tease him after fifty years of a farmer's honest sweat and toil. Yet she unleashed in him feelings of which he had not been aware: he had not been aware that he actually hated his life. Paul. . . . How could Paul bring a change? Loving or hostile, he had infinite time on his hands, while for Baptiste Varioli, if change there was to be, it must come quick. *Eh oui*, he scoffed at himself, there has lately been a change: Smith was sleeping with his wife. No more combing of red hair at sunset! No advancing a step toward a shadow and retreating two steps, no stretching of arms in a void at sunrise. The shadow was dismissed. The brat slept alone under the tent now; oh, yes, the brazen girl playing at being an heiress, as if French trees could be offered by foreigners as presents to French people. . . . Since he had become used to cringing to strangers, Pierre made it all sound nice and cozy, but France was catching up with him all right. Yes, France . . . Louis, Henri, *les gendarmes*, the real people. Baptiste's loyalty lay with poachers, village plumbers, and *gendarmes*, not the *grands messieurs* from Paris pandering to foreigners.

He pulled his cap like an iron mask over his face; the wind choked him, his heart was dilating painfully, yellow and red streaks zigzagged before his eyes. For the first time the storm affected him in this way, and he felt bitter with the Maker for creating men only to humiliate them when they grow old. Why, with one arm his son could deal him sharper blows now than his two arms would ever land on Pierre in the future.

He had the sensation of a hard fist kneading his stomach. Pierre had said, "You will be the one to foot the bill!" What bill? Public money was public property; a

farmer's right to it was better than a warmonger's, and there were no proofs. . . . Pulling his cap up, he steadied himself. The wind had subsided. Ink-blue in the east, honey, coral, and pale green on the sunset side, skies were overcast. In the shrunken space trees stood immobile like furniture, and the oppressive closeness made Baptiste gasp. He felt trapped in an enemy's house.

The guests were all gone when he came back. In the dining room cigarette smoke and the sour smell of wine hung over the dishes, the soiled napkins and the leftovers from two meals piled on the table. No sign of the little girls; some cousin or friend must have taken them to the village for a further treat. The door to the kitchen was open. Muffled voices could be heard talking in the *réserve*, with Titine's in the lead. The absence of Paul seemed unnoticed, and Baptiste resented the indifference. His resolve to keep the boy in the shed overnight remained firm, but he wished more attention was given to the male offspring. He crept out to the shed and put an ear to the chink in the wall. The roost felt empty. He glanced at the padlock. It was untouched. He pulled at the door—it burst open, laying bare the spot where the bolt had been forced from inside. Hoarsely he called, "*César, ici!*" The green wave of artichokes parted; César emerged from it leaping on a chain, at the other end of which Paul tried in vain to dig his feet into the ground. The day's gnawing misery swelled: the wind, the heart, the taste of an alien world. "Come here!" Baptiste rasped. He seized the chain, pulled it, and blindly, savagely struck at his mute, wriggling grandson.

The three voices in the *réserve* still talked. They sounded relaxed, cheerful, in full accord on matters of common interest. Flies buzzed, the last sunray lay across the brick-red floor. As the wind rattled the shutters, Jacqueline's white lace pinned to the back of the sofa stirred gently, while the acrid smell of camomile came up from Suzanne's flower basket. Baptiste slumped down into the upholstered master chair which was covered in mud-brown French cloth. Except for it, the ebony and alabaster clock on the mantelpiece, and the print on the wall showing the Polish Prince Poniatousky jumping on a horse in the river where Napoleon's luck drowned, nothing in the room reminded him of his youth. The heavy mahogany pieces were Titine's proud possessions, brought in from her father's restaurant, and odd bits had accrued through years of interchange between the farm and the ever-shifting crowd of tourists.

Baptiste shut his eyes. The voices in the *réserve* were getting louder, coarser; the family was probably feasting on his best vintage *marc*. They chuckled, they exclaimed, they banged down glasses. Without taking in the words, Baptiste listened to the thick baritone, his son speaking. Indifferently, he thought: I have been young like him. . . . The hour of meditation in the vineyard had brought him to the conclusion that the time had come for him to fix himself a stove in the hut up in the hills, and go and live there with the sheep in the summer, the hares and eagles in the winter, leaving the farm to Pierre. Before going, he would unblock the "secret" flue in the attic where, everyone knew it, Titine had kept Aunt Matilde's bundle of banknotes for years. He would then make her hand over the treasure to their son as security against the possible claims

of the "public fund" crooks—a shameful waste of good Christian money, yet a necessity in a crooked world.

Half-thoughts, half-images drifted through his mind. The name "Matilde" came from the kitchen. The family had moved nearer. He shook off drowsiness and began to listen. "—So you see, my dear children," Titine lisped, "I was right after all. Your father pestered me, insulted me, made my life awful asking for *Tante Matilde's* inheritance to buy some more of that blasted land. . . . But no! I held firm to it. I fought like a tigress for your happiness, Pierrot, *mon amour*. For your happiness and *Tante Matilde's* honor, because she hated peasantry."

"Naturally, you were right, *Maman*," the baritone droned. "It would have been a waste. Now *Tante Matilde* can rejoice in her grave. With Mauricette's skill, and the high-class clientele Mlle. Monroe has recommended to us, our *salon de coiffure* will certainly make her proud. And I promise you, *Maman*, you will never regret the investment. What I got from the Monroes will go into our apartment on the floor above the *salon*, but the lovely little place at the back will be yours, complete with gas, electricity, and all. It will be as chic as any *Tante Matilde* could dream of for herself, and you will live there like a queen, free at last of the stink and dirt of the farm."

Baptiste's throat constricted. Helpless rage made him choke. He heaved himself from the master chair, about to descend on the fools, when, in a red glow, the room went round and round in circles, and the floor melted from under his feet. A dull noise shook the house.

Titine shrieked, "*Seigneur Dieu!* What was that?"

Baptiste was surrounded by panic-stricken faces and helped back into the master chair by anxious hands. Not

looking him in the eyes, Pierre mumbled, "What happened, Papa?"

Baptiste pushed him back. "This room is like a pigsty. I slipped on an orange peel."

They busied themselves sweeping, tidying, walking on tiptoe, brewing a *tisane* for him.

He sipped it as Pierre, beret in hand, stopped by him on his way to the front door. "Wish me good luck, Papa," he said in the cocky voice he used on his father when unsure of himself. "I am going to speak to Smith tonight. I think everything will come all right in the end."

23

As they drove through Cannes after a picnic lunch in the car, the Monroes were struck by a note of the unusual in the familiar scene, an excitement not entirely due to the stormy wind. Agnes blinked. "David!" she exclaimed. "But this is Whitsunday! Look at those puppets over there. . . ."

On the steps of a sumptuous villa a group of *communi-antes*, their veils and skirts flying, posed for a photographer—a perfect picture for *Vogue*. In search of a sheltered spot the man ran from his tripod up to the terrace and back, readjusting the camera, shoving the frothy creatures hither and thither, shouting instructions to the ladies who tried in vain to keep their charges' apparel in place.

"Now where's Pat?" Agnes wondered, then her face fell. "I let her go to school."

"She's all right. She's at the Abbey."

"No; Cynthia and Martin were going to La Turbie today. They said they wouldn't be back before night."

"The Variolis, of course, are busy with their children's Communion . . ." he reflected. "Let's hurry." He stepped on the accelerator.

The wind was against them. It pounced at the car each time they took a turn. Bristling with cypresses, the toylike villages seemed cut in multicolored crystal the air was so dry. Through it, bells pealed, harsher than in England, less melodious, more compelling. As the wind forced the palm trees to bend, something in them creaked like rusty hinges. Now and again a heavy frond fell on the car's roof with a metallic sound. Agnes lit a cigarette and put it into David's mouth. He let it drop to the floor.

"I'm beginning to understand Pat," he said. "With all those ravings about 'in-vi-sable' affairs I must say, she used to give me the creeps. I wanted to shake her up . . . sort of make her see the facts of life for herself. . . ."

"Don't you want to any longer?"

He chuckled nervously. "A fact of life, Agnes, is that the world seems full not so much of wild beasts as wild imaginings . . . Well, a child can tame a bad dog; the imaginings of other people are worse."

"You give me the creeps, David. Anything specific?"

"No, nothing specific, Agnes. I fret because of the wind."

A moving van bearing the name of a Paris firm created a bottleneck on the road; they stopped. "I bet it means another English home on the Riviera sold," she muttered.

"Look over there," he pointed to a girl in blue dungarees standing in a farmyard, facing the fields. Her small breasts conspicuous under a tight shirt, she affronted the elements.

"*Ti-lôô, ti-lôô, viiite*," she called, and big gray, almost black, geese, erect on their clumsy legs, emerged from the *maquis*, their stretched-out hissing necks ejecting a sound not any less strident than the girl's *viiiite*. Proudly, they came up the path, goddesses condescending to meet mortals through the intercession of one half-human, half-animal: a *fauness*. "I wouldn't fret if Pat were like this girl," David said as they moved on.

Pat was not at the camp, and so after locking their things in the station wagon, they rushed on foot down the slope to the village. They found the square empty, blue ribbons of incense still streaming out of the church. The butcher's wife accosted them. "I saw your *petite fille* praying fervently at Mass," she said. "Is the child Catholic?"

They nearly swept her off her feet. "Where is she now? We are looking for her."

"I think, after church, she went in the direction of *Grand Fontaine*," the woman said stiffly. Offended because her question was left unanswered, she was already turning her back on them.

The search then began. Frantic, assaulted by the wind, they climbed hills, descended into ravines, knocked on doors, cried themselves hoarse calling, "Pat . . . Paaat!"

On the Varioli farm two battered Citroens proclaimed the presence of guests from distant parts. A festive hubbub overflowed from the house into the yard. Wearing a brand-new lifelike wig, Mme. Titine ladled out bouillabaisse into

large bowls in the kitchen. *Oui*, she had seen Mlle. Pat in church, but knew nothing about her actual whereabouts. Would not Monsieur and Madame step in for a little something?

"Permit us to talk to Paul, Madame Varioli," David said anxiously. "He might know."

Mme. Varioli smiled wryly. "This is a great family feast, Monsieur. Paul is helping with the serving. He cannot possibly know where Mlle. Pat is."

With apologies they withdrew and sat down for a while behind a tree, collecting thoughts, trying to be reasonable.

"Does Pat see any other schoolfriends beside Paul, Agnes?" It sounded like a prosecutor's taunt, and she burst out crying.

"It is my fault, David. I know it is. I should have kept an eye on her all the time, but she's so plucky, so reliable, I hated to restrain her."

He gave her his handkerchief. "All right, Agnes. Don't get hysterical. Every child plays truant once in a while."

In the *cabanon* the hollow in the straw seemed to suggest that someone small had been nestling there some time before. A pair of rusty scissors lay on the floor. Stooping to pick them up, David remarked, "I shouldn't be surprised if these were the same Mauricette used to cut my bandages with."

The goats' path was strewn with chocolate foil, but the bits had obviously been trampled over for days. It looked as if Pat were playing hide-and-seek with her parents, strands of sunlight like her pigtails luring them in the woods, her stubborn little face looming behind every bush. There were moments when David, in a cold sweat,

lost the sense of reality; he wondered whether he was searching for his daughter or himself, running away from Baptiste who had crucified a bat. Then he felt ashamed of himself. His daughter was not afraid of people; she identified herself with them, felt for them. He remembered how, some two years ago, she had said: "I have a piece of iron in my head." Tired of her impersonations, he had yawned on her. "How did it get there?" Chewing an apple, she had shrugged, and he then recalled that the day before he had read aloud from a paper about someone shot in the head who had survived despite the bullet in his brain. . . . Well, Pat would not stop to consider how a piece of iron got into a person's head; she just knew it might happen to her. The sudden realization of it impressed David not any less than did the Roman little girl in her martyr's crown at Cimiez, and he whispered, "*Sainte Victoire*, help me find my Patsy!"

Agnes in the meantime was plagued by the demon of guilt, and *it* whispered: "You are lazy . . . you are selfish . . . you are a bloody fool. How dared you listen to David's nonsense about a child being able to face the world on its own? You pretended you believed him because the sun pleased you, freedom pleased you, the little game of shadows pleased you. What about the Algerians on the road who follow any blonde creature with their ravenous black eyes? What about that brute Baptiste, and the sly, mealy-mouthed Pierre? The stray dogs? The drunks? The reckless drivers? What about Pat's bronchitis? You are more interested in your Titian flesh, Agnes, than in your daughter's safety. . . ."

David gripped her by the arm. "Listen! We're behaving like a couple of lunatics. Most likely Pat's been sitting

under the tent for at least an hour now, stuffing herself with sweets, wondering where the hell we are. . . .”

As they tore down to the village again, men were trickling one by one into the café for an *apéritif* before early dinner. The wind had died down. The scene breathed peace; the Monroes sobered. David ventured a chuckle. “Don’t you think we’d better keep our antics dark from Patsy?”

She clicked her tongue. “I must see her first, dear.”

As Pat saw her father and mother emerge on the rocky path, she jumped up from the tree stump in the “lounge” and ran to meet them. “I’m sorry, Dad. I’m sorry, Mum!” she cried. “I wasn’t at school today—it’s Whitsunday. I knew and I didn’t tell you. I’m awful.” Her pigtailed less smooth than usual, her legs scratched, she hardly dared embrace them.

Agnes stammered, “Have you eaten? You look wan.”

But David said, “It wasn’t right, Pat. We were very upset. Will you please go to bed at once after your mother’s fed you?”

Not a leaf stirred, cicadas chatted with redoubled zeal, almost tangible smells rose from the *maquis*, and the Esterel beamed. After the stormy interlude, the big June day moved obliviously toward evening, and once more the *Côte d’Azur* took on its Garden of Eden look.

In their little clearing as she made herself comfortable with a rug, Agnes heaved a sigh of relief, “Oooh . . . What an upheaval! Why didn’t you ask her where she’s been, David? All I could think of was feeding, cuddling, and washing her.”

He crushed his cigarette under foot. "I don't feel comfortable putting on fatherly airs with her," he said.

"D'you know what she blurted out, half asleep? 'When I die, Mummy, my soul'll go to Heaven, and my body'll be eaten by worms, but they'll be glowworms. I'll shine.' Rather morbid, don't you think?"

He gave her a sidelong, preoccupied look. "Seems rather an unusual thought."

"Let's hope though," Agnes sounded defiant, "that she grows up a happy girl, not a poetess. By the way, you couldn't have made her happier than by ordering her to bed at seven. Whatever she's been up to, she was quite spent. She started to cry, 'Old Varioli shouldn't punish Paul for it—it was all my fault—' then she drifted off."

The early moon was pinned low on a greenish sky. "It's time for us to clear out of here," she said. "The child is getting confused with all the strangeness around. Today, if it hadn't been for you, David, I think I would have gone crazy myself."

He nibbled at a new cigarette. "I think I needed this afternoon, Agnes. Pat's more important to me than France, Pierre, politics, and the rest."

"Thank God, darling."

Facing a group of pines and the valley below, they smoked in peaceful silence for a while. Then Agnes said, "It's funny though how alive everything is here. Take the *maquis*—it's almost a presence." She breathed in the aroma of pines. "Here even trees seem more alive than people back home."

He grinned. "I'm sorry I'm a person back home."

"Maybe it's a matter of climate." She frowned. "I'm not

religious, but I think if I was born here I'd worship the earth."

"Well, if I were born in Provence I'd worship the Immaculate Conception, it is so earthy here."

She stroked the weeds near her. "I love the earth because you're good to me now," she said. He started, and they embraced.

It was still broad daylight when, his senses redirected to the outside world, David heard himself murmur, "*Joue, joue, ma mignonne . . .*" the words a faint echo of happiness.

They went up to the tent for a look at Pat. White and lithesome like a thing untouched, she slept with her arms spread down her sides over the blanket. They turned away, satisfied, and only now feeling hungry, they ate a big supper.

The valley was flooded with syrupy sunset light, and seen from their vantage point, the village appeared in almost bird's-eye view. The *Place de la République*, a stony triangle with the rambling *mairie* at its base, had two abrupt streets cutting down through a row of tall narrow houses on its right; a fountain gushed in the middle; a balustrade over an escarpment to the left met the houses at a slanting angle where a splash of color announced a café. Caught in the snare of a dying day, the people who lounged round the fountain, as well as those sitting under the plane trees outside the café, or leaning out of the windows, looked like statues created to perpetuate the moment. The sun itself seemed to readjust its rays so as to enclose this particular fragment of humanity into the eternal cycle.

Perfume-vendors from Grasse, Algerian workers, the maid of a Hollywood producer, farmers whose olives were worm-eaten, women with no cooking gas—just log fires

under their casseroles, wine drinkers at sixty francs a bottle, veterans of two world wars, the village idiot, the poacher, the beau, and the *femme fatale*, were all clothed in gold, a glory in which plants and animals shared. Stray dogs and cats out of their misery, and mimosas out of their silence, stepped out to express understanding of the common lot. No effort was made to perform. In the attitudes in which the eye of Providence had arrested them, actors were immobile on their stage.

Agnes, her hair aflame, pressed her cheek to David's. "It's good to be alive," she said. "Let's go to Paris. I want to get into dresses again."

24

Pierre and Mauricette were entering the Abbey kitchen when Cynthia rang up from La Turbie to say that there was no need to cook dinner for them; she and Martin were going to Monte Carlo and would not be back before tomorrow night.

Putting down the receiver, Pierre blew a kiss into the air. The day had started stormily, but had improved as it went along. After the morning scene with his father in the stable had come the children's triumph at church. And in the afternoon his mother had agreed to unblock Aunt Matilde's inheritance, and Mauricette had added useful points to the *Salon de coiffure* plan. Now with the whole

evening free, Pierre could collect his wits before seeing Smith.

Mauricette returned her apron to the closet. "*Tu sais*," she remarked, "she is not bad, that Cynthia girl. She told me yesterday: 'I know your legs swell, Mauricette. I'll try to arrange things so you'll have a rest after the Communion Feast.'"

Pierre yawned. "The trouble with those people is that they understand nothing about us except that our legs swell." He stretched out on the satin-covered sofa in the hall, a survival of the house's magnificence.

Mauricette squatted down beside him. "*Alors . . .* you are pleased to leave them, Pierrot?"

He shrugged. "It is them leaving us. But yes, I am pleased. I want to be a free man, not a lackey." He slipped his good hand under her petticoat. "Soon you will be your own *patronne*, *ma cocotte*, what about it? You always wanted property. . . ."

She nestled closely to him. "You will not hurt Smith though, when you speak to him, will you, Pierrot?"

He withdrew his hand. "Who wants to hurt him? I want to straighten things out with him, *c'est tout*." He gave her a furtive look, then suddenly sprang to his feet and faced her. "Listen!" he cried. "You'd better make up your mind who it is you are interested in, me or Smith." Without waiting for an answer he began to rush up and down the room, talking so fast that his spittle flew. "Do you not understand? We are to start on a new life. I want everything straightened out before that, everything! I want to make a clean breast of the old dirt. *Tu comprends*? I must know where I stand with you. I must know it even before I speak to Smith, because if you still think he's a hero

and I am dirt, then there is no point in my speaking to him!" He stopped and glowered at her. "Do you believe I care? *Mais non!* Let me be dirt! Let my father be dirt. I do not care what people think of us!" He banged his fist on the window sill, after which he returned at a firm, slow pace to his ramble from wall to wall. "To tell you the truth, I do not care at all about what you think, *ma pauvre*. I can always find a pair of nice plump legs for myself to think a lot of me, this I can promise you." He looked grimly determined, like his father when measuring with his steps a vegetable plot in the spring.

Mauricette walked up to him. Taking his face in both her hands, she peered deeply into his eyes. "I do not care for heroes, *chéri*, you know that. Not as I care for you."

He tried to turn his head away, but could not. The next moment they were back on the sofa, and in their beloved country, *l'Amour*.

It was getting dark when he growled, "*Sacré nom de Dieu*, I must be off. I have to see Smith." Then he fell back again on Mauricette's soft body. The unearthly hour of France, sung by poets, lovers, and perfume manufacturers, *l'heure bleue*, was filling the empty house. It sent a chill through him. Why see Smith? Threats, rumors, fears, ambitions dissolved in the ether-blue dusk, and a trip to the English camp on an evening like this seemed an absurdity. But soon the old anxiety ticked again in his heart.

He snatched his beret off the peg, kissed Mauricette on the mouth, and went.

On a folding stool near the tent a small acetylene lamp was burning. Book in hand, not reading, smoking, a dark figure sat on the bare ground. "David!" Pierre called

in a muffled voice, then whistled the first bar of *Alouette*, their signal at the time when the Englishman was recovering in the *cabanon*.

Peering blindly into the darkness, David called back in French: "Is it you, Pierre? I am glad you came." They shook hands. "The girls had a strenuous day. Pat went to bed hours ago," he continued. "And Agnes, I think, is also asleep by now." He fished something out of a case. "Let us take a bottle and duck into the *maquis*. Like that we shall not wake them while we talk. A beautiful night, is it not?"

Wading in the moonlight, sending cicadas into fits of frenzy, they strolled for a while, then settled on a little mound. "To tell you the truth, I meant to go and see you myself tonight, Pierre," Monroe said, "but Agnes told me you would be tired after the children's feast. Have a sip." He handed him the bottle.

Pierre took it, did not drink, after a moment's suspense asked hoarsely, "What was it you wanted to speak to me about? Has anything happened?"

"No. Nothing has happened."

Varioli took a long draft and slapped David on the thigh. "*Cachottier, va . . .* I know you never betray secrets, but why be discreet about such *canaille* as Henri? No, no—" he dismissed Monroe's gesture of protest—"Do not interrupt me. Are we not old comrades, David? I came tonight because I wanted to talk to you frankly. What Henri told you at the *Grand Fontaine* was no secret at all. It is public property, *ça court les rues*, you know."

David glanced reproachfully at the bottle, then resorted to it. "Do you really believe, Pierre—" he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand—"that I am still interested in who dynamited what during the war?"

Pierre's hand shook as he reached for the bottle now. "Oh, so you are not interested in the dynamite anymore," he scoffed. "But you are still interested in my father's jasmine field, *pas vrai*, David?" Greedily he took another deep gulp. "Why pretend? I am sick of the comedy! I need your help, David. I do not mean to lie."

David pushed the bottle furtively behind a shrub. "Neither do I, Pierre," he said. "I planned to see you because we want to leave. I wanted to give your father fair notice, and thank all of you for what you have done for us."

Uneasy silence fell. Monroe cleared his throat. "You seem worried, Pierre. How can I make you believe that the only thing I really care for is your friendship, *mon vieux*?"

Varioli stirred violently. "You do not know how to make me believe? Well, it is simple, *mon Capitaine*! It is exactly what I came to beg you for. Listen! People do not know how I bought the field, they just guess. But you know. You say you are not interested, but they say you are here to investigate. *Eh bien*, I cannot afford not being interested, David. I do not want the family name smeared, and my son's future ruined. Is it my fault Louis hates me? He bungled the tunnel affair as much as I did, and Henri is a dope. Henri thinks a *Croix de guerre* will win for him the old whore in Vence. . . ." He burst out laughing raucously. "Louis told him you are a bigwig, David, and so off goes the old bastard slandering me to you." He wiped off a tear of merriment, then sighed. "Ah, do not worry, *mon Capitaine*! That money, if not used for a good purpose, would have gone to the sewers as sure as there is a God above!"

Impatiently David jerked his head. "But what do you want me to do, Pierre? I am a stranger here." Bitterness crept into his voice.

Pierre seized him by the arm. "Quoi? You a stranger? *Mais non!* My father was telling me only the other day how even as a small boy you defended a bat against him! You speak French, you have eaten French bread since you were a kid. You are not a stranger! And you can prove that you are a friend, too." With his gloved iron hand he pushed the beret off his forehead where drops of sweat were glistening. "Oh yes, David, you can. All you have to do is give me an affidavit, a certificate of sorts, anything in writing, to say that the sum you entrusted me with was spent according to plan. What about it?" Tense, exultant, he watched David's mouth, as if expecting the Holy Dove to fly out of it.

David averted his eyes. He reached for the bottle with an unsure hand and had a go at it. "*Eh bien*, I regret," he said; "I do not think what you suggest is feasible. I have no authority to give such certificates." He made a deprecating movement. "And what good would such a scrap of paper be to you?"

The moon had topped the tree, and Pierre's face was revealed, shrunk in exasperation. "What good?" he chortled. "Enormous good! Unless what you say is not true . . . unless you *are* investigating. Can you not understand that no one here will touch the dead rat? They just yap. Why, my mother is *une héritière*, and my father is worth ten times the field. Do you think Louis has no other cats to whip? Henri is a lazy animal. They yap so long as there is no document to disprove the yapping. . . . I am starting on a new life, David . . ." His voice broke. "A dignified, not a lackey's life. Mauricette and I, we have been working hard for years, we put money aside. My mother is helping us, we are going to run an establishment of our own. You hear that? I do not want people to slander me! How can an in-

telligent man like you not understand a simple thing like this?" Breathing heavily, he ruffled his hair.

They got up. Whistling the *Alouette* through clenched teeth, Monroe stared blankly at the moon, then with Pierre in his wake, he strode off in the direction of the camp. After a few paces he stopped. "Listen, Pépé," he said, "I am *not* investigating. I never was and never will. All this is a pack of wild imaginings. So far as I am concerned, the whole matter is dead and buried. I can tell you more: the Marseilles man is dead too. Now you are asking for an impossible thing, Pépé! You want me to absolve you from a guilt. Yes, this is what you really want. Well, I cannot do it! I am not a priest."

They stood facing each other, speechless, steeped in a dead light. Smith, rigid, a forced smile frozen on his lips, Pierre's eyes dilating in an effort to convey more than words could. "So that is what you are . . ." he finally gasped. "Mauricette believed you were a hero. *Merde alors!* A fine hero who betrays his friends in their hour of need. A mean traitor, that is what you are, Monsieur Monroe, and no doubt about it!"

David's mouth twitched. "This is no news to me," he muttered. "I know I am a traitor, Pépé."

Varioli jumped. "Do not call me Pépé! I am a grown man with family responsibilities. I saved your life, and you refuse to sign a scrap of paper for me. What's this nonsense about guilt? What guilt? Whose guilt? Why should I ask you to absolve me? You think that to be a tidy cold fish is virtue. You are a saint because you use a lot of soap, yes? Yes?" He made as if to strike him, but Monroe did not budge, and the angry hand fell back.

"Forgive me, Pierre." David's smile vanished. "What I

meant was that we are both traitors to our youth."

Smooth and cold, the light seemed to coagulate on their faces. Pierre's chest heaved. He gave a thin, whining sob. David touched his right arm. The gesture was shy, as if, instead of metal, there were still a wound inside the sleeve.

It was then they heard the cry.

25

After César had been chained up again, and Paul, shaking with pain and resentment, had disappeared round the corner of the shed, the evening stretched endless before Baptiste Varioli. He pottered about the yard, yawned, and scratched his head. He felt fine now, and only the unusual rapidity of his thoughts, which chased each other helter-skelter, reminded him of the queer behavior of his body in the afternoon.

One by one the lights were going up in the farmhouse; first in Titine's window, then the children's; then above the conjugal bed of his son, Mauricette's pink-shaded lamp came alive. Before sliding effortlessly from supper into dreams, his family were certain to be remembering him; they were mocking him, deriding him. The garrulous voices seemed to ring in his head. Pierre, anxious to report to his father one more stupid development in his stupid story, soon would be back from his talk with the Englishman.

Baptiste longed for the company of César, but the *petite diablesse* had changed the dog into a willful, bounc-

ing creature; no solace was to be expected there. He collected the hoe and the spades and dragged them up to the shed.

The June day was still yielding an ashy light, yet inside the shack it was dark. He had to feel his way along the wall with his hand. In the corner it encountered something cold, metallic. He grabbed the object. It was a rifle. Dropping the tools, Baptiste returned with his find to the yard. For years he had ignored the existence of this symbol of Pierre's Resistance. Now he was glad of the discovery, something for his erratic thoughts to concentrate upon. On the stone bench near the well he broke the carbine, saw that it was loaded, blew through the barrels, set it again, and settled down to brooding. The rifle ought to have been turned in at the *gendarmérie* years and years ago, or else a permit should have been obtained. As things stood, the old piece of junk was a useless menace; a child might discharge it, anybody might inform on it, and nobody could hunt with it. The nice feeling of self-importance once more filled Baptiste; they all talked and fussed, but he was the only one to tackle the necessary jobs. He slung the rifle over his shoulder; he knew of a deep well in the Abbey grounds where the thing could be safely drowned.

The country, bleached by the rising moon, looked clean, peaceful. He chucked off his Sunday shoes and socks. The wind-swept paths were pleasant to bare feet, and there was no one to scold him: "Baptiste, *les chaussures!* Do you want people to say the Variolis are going to the dogs?"

He took the same route he used to follow on his secret excursions to the camping site. A dry ground mist blurred the contours of the trees; it also made village lamps and the swift-moving headlights on the road below seem very

distant, a part of a different life. Somewhere there in that haze was the woman. He had not given her a thought for days now. She was someone to watch, or to enter into, not someone to think about. He stared at the night around. . . . Any time now the whole world, the day and the night, would slip out of his reach, just as the chair had in the afternoon. There would be no pain, no ugly scar on his past, and no redhead to watch—ever.

He halted where the lane forked. He did not feel like parting with the gun yet. Its weight across his shoulder, the springy gait on bare feet, the quiet night after a stormy day—the freshness, the opaline elusiveness—created a semblance of youth, and the idea of soon coming back home was loathsome; Baptiste wanted the walk to last. He preferred to turn to the left and climb another hill to reach his burrow behind the oak tree. Pierre should be at the camp now, engaging the Englishman. Let him. Baptiste was not interested in what they had to say; he was interested in watching the redhead while they talked. The Abbey well could wait for the rifle.

Night made great play with the tiniest noise. As Baptiste with the carbine plunged into the burrow, the rustling of last year's leaves frightened him. He mounted a boulder which had served him as a footstool many a time before, and looked around. The peace seemed undisturbed at the camp. Emboldened by the stillness, he heaved himself to the edge of the hollow. There was no one in sight.

He had noticed that when Monroe slept with his wife in the station wagon the rear was left open. It was open now. And so, most likely, Pierre had not turned up for the much-talked-of showdown with his comrade. . . . Or maybe he had already left. Curiosity stung Baptiste. What if he

were to try and discover for himself what was going on inside that car? He wanted nothing so much as to see the outline of the couple or perhaps the woman's naked arm resting on the man's chest. It was no good imagining what it felt like to be the husband of a redhead; no good and no way. The Corsican baker, the English Smith, the past, the present, jealousy, hate, desire had all died in Baptiste; only curiosity survived.

He moved quietly on bare feet. The moon soaring above the ground mists had grown so brilliant that darkness practically vanished, and on reaching the station wagon Baptiste saw that the woman was alone; neither her husband nor the child was with her. She lay on her back. Eyes shut, her face silvery, she looked unreal. Spread over the pillow, only the copper hair seemed alive, and some forgotten gladness, something like the smell of a flower in the woods, long, long ago when one was young and full of wonder, disturbed the old man.

He approached the open window and stood smitten with awe, at no great distance from the dreamlike face. The mouth was closed. Did she breathe? He slid the rifle down his arm. Now he could lean over and touch that hair he had had to forego in his youth, because it was a foundling's hair. In bending down he unwittingly pressed the door handle, and it clicked. A shiver ran through the sleeping lids, lashes fluttered, the eyes slowly opened, then froze in horror; the mouth fell apart, a cry shattered the stillness.

Baptiste saw a throat swelling with an ever-more piercing, ever-less human cry; prolonged, blood-chilling, the animal wail of panic: Lucia's cry. His heart stalled. So this was really Lucia. She had recognized him. She still hated him. She recoiled from his touch. He knew the cry would

now sharpen and become words, words which he could not bear to hear again: "Don't touch me! Bandit! Assassin! . . ." and his hands flew to stop the words.

After a while, stillness returned.

Pat had awakened under the tent. She was not sure whether the cry she had heard was a sinner's chased by a devil in her dream, or César howling at the moon. She wondered if the howling had frightened her mother. But then she remembered that her father was now sleeping there, and she yawned contentedly. For a minute or so she strained her ears; hearing nothing more, just crickets, she drew the blanket over her head. Her father would certainly not let anyone bother his family—not even a devil.

David was the first to burst into the clearing. As he stumbled over a log, he caught a glimpse of the Shadow slipping out of his sight; he faltered, then hurled himself into the car. In the watery moonlight Agnes lay there, blue like a violet, eyes bulging out of their sockets, her tongue half out of her mouth—a formidable dummy from a drama at Mme. Tussaud's. "Agnes!" he gasped, and fell over her. Pressing his head to her warm breast, he listened, but the heart had nothing more to say.

He sprang to his feet, roaring, "She's dead! My wife's dead! *Vite, Pierre*, I've seen the man! . . ."

The *maquis* still swayed in the wake of the Shadow as David leapt after it, but Pierre's legs refused to carry him. Stupified, he glared at the blue woman, and a ghastly presentiment chilled his blood. She had not been shot, she was strangled. . . . Fearfully, he turned his head at the very moment when, peering from behind a cloud, the moon lit a

man's figure laboring across the stretch of juniper down the slope. Pierre's stomach heaved; it was his father. It was Baptiste Varioli. Pierre made a supreme effort to live up to the moment. His mind remained a blank though. His body was rigid. His lips struggled helplessly with the word "Papa...."

A shot then rang out, a dull noise rolling down the hill. Pierre moved, and saw David jump, double up, and fall limply, like a stricken bat.

Rubbing her eyes, Pat now appeared in front of the tent. All she could see was Monsieur Varioli *Jeune* standing near the station wagon, and Monsieur Varioli, *le père*, coming up the hill, a gun in his hand, while neither her father nor her mother was anywhere to be seen. All this—in the middle of the night—struck her as funny. "Allô, M. Pierre!" she called in a husky voice. "Where are Papa and Ma . . ." she did not finish, she was so surprised. Because M. Varioli *Jeune* started violently and put his hand to his mouth, as if to bite it; making whining noises, not minding her, lifting his legs very high, he straggled in the opposite direction from which his father was approaching. Baptiste, too, looked strange. His teeth bared in a silly grin, his mouth crooked, his eyebrows raised, not saying a word, clasping the gun in both hands, he walked toward her in long strides, slowly, carefully, perhaps not wanting to disturb her parents' sleep.

He had almost come even with her when she felt suddenly frightened. Staring fixedly at her, he raised the rifle like a club . . . She shot up. "What is it?" she cried. "What is the joke?" Her mouth shrank, and she began to run.

There were no thoughts in her, just elation at being able to run so fast. The earth echoed under her feet, the

air whizzed as she tore it with her chin, fireflies fled in sheafs, it rained stars. Her heart went bong-bong-bong, something like a piece of iron pushed down from her head into her throat, and got stuck there. Suddenly a weed caught her round the ankle, and she fell on her knees. She heard someone's loud breathing, the moon grew enormous, then burst with a crash, sending splinters right through her head, hurting it terribly. Something hot was pouring over her face, she tasted salt on her tongue. . . . In a second she saw a multitude of things: her Mum's violet eyes, her Dad's bare knees looking worried in the sun, Mr. Dobson in a mule's hat, the Misses Flop carousing on bicycles in the air, Mme. Titine with a magpie on her shoulder, Paul with a sandwich in his mouth, a white round wafer getting whiter and whiter, larger and larger, until it covered everything. She gasped, "My soul. . . ." Blood filled her mouth, and her body died.

26

In the turbid paleness of dawn, as cockerels crowed, Baptiste dropped his son's rifle into the cistern where deep water—Mme. l'Eau—had swallowed Pat's coin and her lunch, once offered in exchange for unearthly goods.

The moss on the walls muffled the splash. Sending jets of spittle flying, Mme. l'Eau spurted angrily, then went on dozing. Baptiste stared into the dim mirror below; it seemed to him that reddish spots appeared on the surface.

He squinted at his palms and wiped them off on his coat.

In the meantime, Pierre, his head buried in his arms, sat in the olive grove, waiting for Fate to take charge. He realized that the only sensible thing for him to do was go home, lie down beside his wife, and pretend to sleep. But he could not bear to think of Mauricette asking him: "How did it go with Smith, *chéri*? Why are you so late?" A fatigue so great weighed him down that even to change his posture seemed beyond his power. Nauseating rancor filled him, a poisonous distaste. Why had he to be involved in such senseless, enormous acts?

His brain throbbed with dismal monotony: they were killed for nothing, for nothing. . . . He would drop off, and wake in a shock, the word "nothing" bitter on his lips.

At the barren hour when his father prodded him on the back, saying, "Nobody will find the carbine, son, nobody in the village knows of the abbot's cistern," the sobbing which the woman's cry had forced back into Pierre's throat burst out in violent hiccups.

"You s-shot him out of the g-gun I h-had when I s-saved his life! I d-don't want to l-live."

Baptiste gaped at the paling sky. "What about the farm? You are my son, and it now belongs to you."

Pierre's head rolled on his crossed arms. "You, you!" he howled. "You made me betray our youth, you killer, you strangler of women, you. . . ." The hideous sounds he made scared a bird off its branch. But as Monroe's words boomeranged through Pierre's mind, the hiccups stopped. "Our youth?" Well, no! "Wild imaginings" indeed! There had never been David Monroe's and Pierre Varioli's "our youth!" The Englishman's youth had run its course in villas and airplanes while Pierre's youth, its tail down like a

beaten dog's, straggled along country roads. Smith's youth would repose grandly under a marble monument, while Pierre's rotted in a ditch for passers-by to kick at. He lifted a sulky gaze to the matted beard beside him. "Do not worry, *mon père*. I shall not tell you killed them."

Old Varioli shook and moved away as if importuned in his sleep. "What was that?" he mumbled. "I killed them?" Then his voice thickened. "Oh, yes, yes, naturally." He straightened up. "No need for you to tell. I shall tell myself that I killed her because she was insulting me." The words now came sonorous, big, as if he addressed a court. "All my life the woman was insulting me. On the Ile Ste. Margueritte she called me an assassin for defending her against that Corsican brute. And here she said I was a shadow on my own grounds. The man? He was not a man, he was a vampire, with shriveled feet and idle hands. The girl? . . ."

Pierre gripped him by the shoulder. "For God's sake, you have not killed the child, Papa?"

Baptiste shrugged. "She was not a child. She was a *petite diablesse*. She drove your son to sacrilege."

Like a pond in winter, the night froze. Time faded. In the void which made Christ avert his eyes from the chalice the earth, the sky, the two bodies turned to stone. And there they sat, spiritless, the father and the son, not waiting for the day, because for them everything had already happened. But darkness went on paling.

Lavender rustled as they heard someone hurrying up the hill, and Paul's face, blinded by the rising sun, appeared above the ridge.

The shrubs parted. Lips trembling, Paul ran up to his father. "Papa," he whispered, "*les gendarmes* are on the farm. They are asking for you and *Grandpère*. They say

that the Algerian who works on the road just saw something horrible on the camping site."

From under his lashes, he glanced at Baptiste, and suddenly, his eyes growing wide, he flung himself against the old man. "What have you done to Pat?" he cried. "What have you done to her? I know you did something terrible. I know it!" Shaking all over, he belabored his grandfather's legs with his fists.

Baptiste sat quietly, letting the blows fall on his swollen knees. He bore his grandson's rage with patience and some grandeur. "Whatever I did, you are not my judge, my child," he said.

Ever brighter, the day entered the grove, making the abbot's olives tremulous and young once again. The rooster on the farm crowed, Baptiste steadied himself. "I am ready for the justice of the French Republic," he solemnly announced.

Pierre stood up, shivered, yawned, and followed his father on the road to the farm and the Great Change achieved by Baptiste Varioli.

Paul at first ran after the two men. But as they were passing the *cabanon*, he halted and fell back. One of the earliest sunrays had found its way through the cedar trees and the little statue in her niche was bathed in crimson light. Her glazed robes shone; she seemed alive, pleased with the radiant morning.

Paul crept inside, and knelt on the straw mattress. "*Très Sainte Marie Toujours Vierge*," he whispered. "I know who hurt Pat, and she was a Lamb of God, not a *petite diablesse*. Oh, *Sainte Vierge*, please, let me go to England with Pat if she lives, or to Heaven if she dies, because I do not want to kill my own grandfather. Amen."

He felt better after this and rushed back into the daylight. As he looked around, he saw something glitter on the grass; he picked it up; it was a bit of chocolate foil, and he wept. "Pat, Pat, where are you?" he sobbed. "I hid away lots of cake for you. Do not die, I am coming with you."

He would have given anything to know what was going on at the camp, but he was scared to go near it, scared of the *gendarmes*, and scared of Almighty God. He climbed the tree then, to the nest where he had argued with Pat after her father had had tea at the Abbey. Perched on a creaking branch, he tried to remember what she had ever wished him to do for her. She was not really keen on cakes, and even the farm cherries did not appeal to her much. Instead, she wanted the Angel's Bread, and this he had given her. She had asked for his catechism book, and that, too, he had lent her. He made a great effort, and a scene revived in his mind. Pat, her catlike eyes fixed on the dancing flames, fetters hanging loosely from her bruised wrists, her mouth a pink scar, a Jeanne d'Arc refusing to be burnt. "Do you want me to burn the grove?" he had asked. "Yes," she had replied.

He slid down the tree. After yesterday's storm the ground was strewn with branches; it did not take him long to build a pile. He sneaked up to the spot where the matches were hidden.

He lit the wood, flames crackled, a dry leaf fell from an olive tree and flared up like a little rocket. Sparks flew. Fireflies, he thought, as big as headlamps. She loves them. And grandfather will never get the grove.

A dog howled in the distance. Paul recognized César, and he crossed himself. She is dead, he said aloud.

One of the flames, slender like the tongue of the Holy

Spirit, reached the low branch of an olive tree. It embraced it, licked it, touched the trunk, and soared upward. The grove of the old Abbot, which Patricia Monroe had offered to the farmer Baptiste Varioli, caught fire, and spoke. But the speech of the fire, and the speech of the trees, and the speech of the wind were not human.

Paul was stricken with horror. He leaped to the well and grasped the rusty bucket, wanting to fill it. But Mrs. Water slept very far below, in her depth; there was no way to draw from her with a bucket.

Weeping, shaking his fist at the sky, he began to yell. "Pat, Pat come back! You are not Jeanne d'Arc, you are not a Lamb of God, you're *une petite diablesse*, and this is your sin! Come back at once and put that fire out! I'm telling you, come back!"

He fell to the ground, sobbing, "Oh, God, she told me to burn the grove because she didn't want me to burn her. This is her sin, God, and I won't confess to it! No, no!"

He beat the earth with his fists, as if it were Pat's body. Then he sprang up, and jumping through the flames, stopping his ears with his fingers, shouting, "Come back, you!" he tore blindly down toward the farm.

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